

Edmund N. Carter

To my dear brother  
George -

been in business  
testimony of St. Luke's  
~~thoughtful~~ of others

from the author  
William.

Nov. 28, 1940.

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# THE SUPERNATURALNESS OF CHRIST

*Can We Still Believe In It?*

BY

WILBUR M. SMITH

*Department of English Bible, Moody Bible  
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Notes on the International Sunday  
School Lessons*



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THE SUPERNATURALNESS OF CHRIST  
CAN WE STILL BELIEVE IN IT?

Made in the United States of America

*To my dear Mother*

SADIE SANBORN SMITH

*gracious, understanding, devout, devoted and  
generous friend of young women students,  
and missionaries throughout the world  
writer of beautiful letters, lover of great books, who  
surrounded her children with the noblest influences  
an earthly home could ever know and whose  
prayer that her first son should be a min-  
ister of the Word God graciously  
answered.*

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*of the Gospel Record*, by Professor Ernest Findlay Scott. Dr. Harry Elmer Barnes very kindly gave permission to make extended quotations from his *Twilight of Christianity*. The quotation from Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows*, is by arrangement with the publishers, Bobbs-Merrill and Co., of Indianapolis.



## PREFACE

THE greatest battle of our modern age is not the one that was fought at Waterloo, or the one fought a century later at Verdun, or the one that will be fought on any field in Europe, beneath the waters of the sea, or above the clouds over the coast of Britain. The greatest battle of our age is the one now being fought by two invisible armies, as they struggle to dominate the minds of men. The one army we may rightly call SUPERNATURALISM; the other, with equal accuracy, we shall designate NATURALISM.

By SUPERNATURALISM we mean a belief in a living, sovereign, omnipotent God, and, in the western world, we mean the manifestation of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ as He lived and moved among men on our earth nineteen hundred years ago. NATURALISM, on the other hand, includes "every form of philosophy which believes that in the last resort the basis of all things is physical, whether that basis be conceived of as matter, or as physical energy, or a configuration of space-time, . . . a philosophy which insists that science is the only true way of describing reality, and that when completed, it will tell us the final truth about the universe."<sup>1</sup>

For nineteen hundred years the Christian Church has uninterruptedly declared that it was bearing testimony to supernatural truths, and that it rested on a historical foundation of supernatural events. These events, the Christian faith has always affirmed, center in and find their most remarkable manifestation in, the life and work of Jesus Christ, primarily in His miraculous birth, His Transfiguration, His own miraculous deeds, and His Resurrection. If

these are ever given up, the supernaturalness of the Christian faith is simultaneously abandoned.

Naturalism persistently, uncompromisingly denies the supernatural. Naturalism insists that there does not exist any positive evidence warranting man's believing in the supernatural. It denies that there was anything truly miraculous in the thirty-three years of our Lord's life on earth. That naturalism is increasingly the conviction of leaders of thought and action in the western world, as a whole, no one can deny. Our books of science almost invariably make no mention of God. Our histories, when they speak of the age of Christ, never recognize anything miraculous in His life and work. Our philosophers today are, for the most part, decidedly naturalistic. So, we grieve to say, are many of our professors of Divinity.

The outstanding authority in Christian apologetics today, after devoting forty years of careful study to contemporary thought, himself a conservative, says in his latest book (and who can deny it?), "there is no doubt that whereas fifty or one hundred years ago there was a universally accepted background of conviction as to the elementary truths of biblical religion, that background has, for the younger generation, at least, largely disappeared."<sup>2</sup>

It cannot be denied that naturalism is winning to its support vast numbers of our younger generation, capturing, first, multitudes of students in our colleges and universities, and then, through their influence, their teaching, their writing, their indifference to all religion, an even greater multitude of young people who have never had the privilege of university training. However, we dare to suggest that naturalism has been accepted by so many in our day, not because the foundations of the Christian faith have been destroyed, but because those who are determined not to believe in God, or in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, are continually insisting, without an examination of the evidence, that the foundations have been destroyed!



In this volume, it is our desire to encourage a new generation of students to carefully examine for themselves the evidence for the *supernaturalism of Christ*. It is tragic when people feel that there are sufficient reasons for abandoning the Christian faith; it is more tragic, however, when they are found abandoning such faith without reason, simply because they are under the spell of some great scholar, either in his classroom, or through his books, who himself persistently sets out to deny those truths which the Christian Church has maintained as necessary for faith throughout its history.

This work of apologetics is particularly intended for young people who, during their academic training, find the Christian faith continually under attack, who are mingling with many who have long ago repudiated the supernaturalness of the New Testament and the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, who find themselves floundering about in the morass of contemporary unbelief, well knowing that to lose such faith as they have means to sink into an unsatisfying skepticism and dark pessimism. I have tried not to write a superficial work, something which carelessly skims the surface of some of the profoundest problems which seriously-minded young people must face today, and are facing. I have attempted to go down to the very foundations of our faith, especially as this faith relates to supernaturalism, to discover if, as Christians, our faith rests on shifting sand, or on solid rock. This will mean that parts of this volume will inevitably prove a little difficult reading.

Personally, I never have been, and am not now, interested in philosophical speculations, but some of the severest attacks upon our faith have been those along philosophical lines, and I have found myself compelled to face these arguments. Some of the most brilliant minds of the last two generations have been definitely opposed to the entire idea of supernaturalism. Their arguments cannot be dismissed with the wave of the hand. Those arguments raised against

one aspect of our faith, or another, or against supernaturalism entirely, that are silly on the very surface, need not bother us, but the more serious ones, which seem to be having the greatest influence over the minds of our own generation, must certainly be examined with care. At the same time, though I have tried to face frankly all the serious arguments which have been raised against supernaturalism, I have definitely avoided entering into philosophical discussions so profound that no one could understand what I was saying. I do not believe the man on the street, or most college students, are interested in the fine points of such speculation. I must confess I have had some books in my hands discussing, for example, the miracles of Christ, in which theories were set forth with such a highly technical philosophical phraseology that when I had finished reading them, I did not know exactly what the author was getting at. I want, in this book, to talk with people who are normally intelligent, and not with advanced scholars who have spent forty years in the undisturbed quiet of their libraries. I have tried to approach all these problems as I should like someone else to approach them were I reading another person's book on this subject.

I have made extensive use of quotations from the more important literature that has arisen around the subjects herein discussed, some of them being purposely quite long. This has been done for a number of reasons. (1) It is most important for us to know *exactly* what the opponents of supernaturalism have said, and are saying today, and this knowledge is most accurately obtained not by consulting their critics, but by carefully studying the original words of such anti-supernaturalists. I have felt it was best that my readers have these words before them, rather than general summaries of them. (2) I am not an authority in the field of New Testament criticism, and, young people today (rightly) being insistent upon hearing what *authorities* have to say about any question under discussion, I



have sought continually to bring to the witness stand such recognized authorities. (3) Carefully and extendedly quoting the outstanding volumes of our time which, in one way or another, deny the supernatural, will make it impossible for any reader to say I have been unfair in interpreting any author. The author is allowed to speak for himself. (4) This volume will, I hope, fall into the hands of many (among others) who are living in rural districts, and small towns, where access to large libraries is out of question. Because so many in our wide land are permanently denied the privilege of consulting many of these volumes, even some of the most important ones, I have tried to make my quotations so frequent and full that those who wish in the future to discuss these subjects in public, in the pulpit or in the classroom, will here find considerable authoritative material at their immediate disposal. May I add here my great indebtedness to the librarians of Princeton Theological Seminary, the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Chicago, Garrett Biblical Institute, of Evanston, the University of Chicago, Union Theological Seminary in New York City, and the New York Public Library, who have so generously placed their vast collections at my disposal.

A quotation from any author, used approvingly, must not in any case be interpreted as the approval of all that the same author has written, even in the book from which a quotation is taken. Thus, e.g., Professor Ernest Findlay Scott, in his recent work, *The Validity of the Gospel Record*, has some excellent things to say about the historical trustworthiness of the Gospel narratives, and I have made extensive use of his fine arguments. Yet, Professor Scott does not accept as historical the miracle-stories—though he gives no *reason* for rejecting them. The major arguments of the book are valuable; his rejection of miracles is, of course, fatal.

I have deliberately refrained from making any references to what may be called "popular" literature in the field of

apologetics. All of my references are to the works of acknowledged scholars, both those who are opposed to and those who are firmly convinced of the reality of the supernatural. To this I believe there is only one exception, a quotation in chapter four from Mr. Bruce Barton's widely-circulated, cleverly entitled work, *The Man Nobody Knows!* The reason for allowing a quotation from this work will be seen when this chapter is read.

The academic positions of many of the men whose works are referred to I have taken the liberty of giving, because I believe a great many names in the theological world are not known to that large body of young people today who are pursuing non-theological subjects in our higher institutions of learning. They may, in their history, literature, or science classes, hear attacks upon the supernatural aspects of Christianity, but they are not acquainted with the standard works pertaining to these subjects. When they leave college, many of them will have their minds filled with doubts, but will not know where to secure literature of the first importance relating to the subjects against which, in their hearing, so many attacks have been made. It makes a great deal of difference, at least it does to me, whether a man writing a book (on the great subject of our Lord's supernaturalness) is a popular preacher, who must every Sunday present his material in a popular way, to hold a large audience, but who himself is not a particularly careful student, or whether the author of a book is a professor in some theological school, who has a high reputation for scholarship among theologians of his country, and who has had the opportunity to give years of consideration to the particular subject he is discussing.

I have not in any way attempted to give a history of the discussion of the subjects we are here considering. There are a great number of books covering the entire field of the history of rationalism in Europe during the last three centuries, and it would be distinctly out of place for me to



even attempt a brief survey of such a vast literature in these pages. I have made only one exception in this particular matter, and that is an examination of the philosophical arguments of Hume against miracles, because Hume is still being quoted today, and is often referred to as the one who annihilated this aspect of the Christian faith. In other words, I have tried in this book to face these questions in a fresh way, not depending upon the now stale arguments of a century long gone by, but devoting my attention to those arguments, pro and con, which are really being vitally discussed by our contemporary generation.

Well do I know that this book is in no way an exhaustive treatment of the supernatural elements of Christ's life. When you realize that the late Professor J. Gresham Machen wrote a volume three times as large as this on the one subject of the Virgin Birth alone, a subject which must in this book be discussed in only one brief chapter, and when one realizes that at least thirty volumes have been published in English in the last fifteen years on the single subject dealt with in chapter two, one begins to realize how really impossible it would be, in such limited space, to treat exhaustively these really inexhaustible questions. Probably a much larger work would not be read by young people, who have been continually in my mind in the writing of these pages. Perhaps, if the Lord gives strength, should this book be blessed by Him to the hearts of some, I might during the next five years undertake an enlarged edition, going into each subject with greater thoroughness, and giving my readers a more elaborate apparatus of footnotes. Such a work should really include a brief history of the attacks upon the supernaturalness of Christianity during the last three centuries, a chapter, perhaps, on the evidence of the *inspiration* of the Gospel records, and, most of all, a rather thorough investigation of the interesting subject of the place that the Lord Jesus Christ is assigned in

volumes that have been written during the last fifty years dealing with the history of the Roman world in the first century of our era. This last subject would in itself make a magnificent subject for a doctoral thesis. I had hoped to write a final chapter on "The Verdict at the End of Life," recording some of the tragically pessimistic statements of antisupernaturalists regarding the fate of man, the emptiness of life, and the hopelessness of the future. But this too will have to wait for a later and larger edition. Were there space, I would like to have added a list of the most worth-while books on the principal subjects discussed in this volume.

The author himself has been an active pastor for some twenty years, and during the last two years has had the privilege (and continues to enjoy such a privilege) of being a member of the Department of English Bible in the Moody Bible Institute. During these years of labor in the Word, it has been his great joy to speak to thousands of young people in Bible Conferences throughout our country. He can thoroughly sympathize with young people today who are demanding that Christians be able to give a reason for the hope that is within them. He is fully aware that we are living in a distinctly skeptical age, and that it is the "normal" (but really abnormal) thing for young people today to doubt the Christian faith (though millions firmly believe it). What he does believe is that much of this doubt is without justification, and that many young people are casting aside the faith of their fathers, simply because they hear it laughed at by others, or because they pretend to be the followers of some great leaders of thought in our contemporary age, like H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell, Julian Huxley, John Dewey, etc., and place themselves as slaves at the feet of these older, skeptical men, believing that they and they alone must have the truth. All one can ask young people to do today is to carefully examine, without prejudice, the evidence for themselves as to whether



the supernatural elements of our Lord's life, such as His virgin birth, His Transfiguration, His miracles, and His Resurrection, can still be believed without compromise, without apology, and without intellectual hypocrisy.

The author himself believes that the evidence for such supernaturalism is overwhelming. In one thing all of his readers, whoever they are, will agree with the author, and that is that we owe it to ourselves, to our generation, either to come to individual conclusions in these matters, or to cease denying their impossibility. Let us at least divorce ourselves from abject blind servitude to the opinions of men, who throughout their lives have been bitterly opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ, and independently investigate for ourselves this preeminently important subject, which has engaged the attention of some of the greatest scholars of every age. Because the Lord Jesus was the most wonderful person who ever lived, as the whole world acknowledges, because His life and character and teachings have had greater influence over the human race than the life and character and teachings of any other being who ever lived, because He promises eternal life to those who believe in Him, whether we think the promise was true or not, because He said He died because He loved us, and would save us from our sins, because if the record is true, He broke the power of death and through His victory over death gives us the assurance of a hope that fadeth not away, because millions of people have found in Christ a peace and joy and power which have never been found by other people in any other prophet who ever arose, we at least owe it to ourselves, for our present richness of life, and we owe it to our eternal destiny, to face once for all, frankly, fearlessly, carefully, without prejudice, the facts of the Christian faith, to determine, as was said of a group of students in ancient time, "whether these things are so" (Acts 17:11). This volume is an attempt to set forth the basic facts involved in the birth, the Transfiguration, the miraculous

acts, and the Resurrection, of Jesus Christ, that people may have an opportunity to individually come to definite conclusions as to whether Christ was or was not a truly supernatural person, the Son sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world.

W. M. S.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> D. S. Cairns: *The Riddle of the World*. New York. 1938. pp. 7, 8.

<sup>2</sup> D. S. Cairns: *ibid.*, pp. 34, 35. Dr. Cairns has been the Professor of Dogmatics and Apologetics in the United Free Church College, Aberdeen, since 1907.

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## THE DENIAL OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

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## CHAPTER I

# THE DENIAL OF THE SUPERNATURAL IN CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

### EVIDENCE OF THE GENERAL DENIAL OF THE REALITY OF THE SUPERNATURAL

PROFESSOR J. D. BURY (1861-1927), one of the greatest historical scholars of the last century, Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge from 1902-1927, and the author of some of the most epochal works on Roman history written in modern times, in his widely circulated (though not one of his best works) *History of Modern Thought*, which he wrote after devoting forty years of his life to hard study, begins his section on "The Progress of Rationalism," with this sentence: "During the last three hundred years reason has been slowly but steadily destroying Christian mythology and exposing the pretensions of supernatural revelation."<sup>1</sup>

Now I must confess that I have the profoundest respect for a man of great learning, and am willing at any time to yield my mind to an authority in any great field of research and investigation, provided I am convinced that he speaks without prejudice, that his statements rest on an exhaustive examination of facts, and that his conclusions are not determined by theories previously adopted. This is just what all of us have to do, continually, when we begin the study of any subject which we have not mastered ourselves. Here, then, we find one of the great historians of modern times, a man who had read thousands of volumes, who knew Greek and Roman civilization as few men of his

time were able to know it, whose historical works marked a new epoch in the investigation of Roman law, and who carried about in his head most of the good and worthwhile things that the great minds of all ages have ever produced, emphatically asserting that what we call Christian truth is fundamentally to be looked upon as "mythology," and that our "supernatural revelation" is only a "pretension." *Is this the conclusion to which all of us must come?* That hundreds of thousands of well-educated men and women throughout the western world have come to this conclusion, or at least are repeating such phrases as this, is admitted.

That the question of supernaturalism is not, even in this modern day, a mere museum relic of the theological debates of the nineteenth century, is clearly seen, e.g., in a recent book by the most influential philosopher of education in our generation, Dr. John Dewey, Professor of Philosophy in Columbia University since 1904, former President of the American Psychological Association, and, formerly, President of the American Philosophical Society. Professor Dewey has called this book, which forms his lectures on the Dwight Harrington Terry Foundation in Yale University, *A Common Faith*. In this comparatively small volume of eighty-seven pages, I find that the word "supernatural" occurs eighty-two times—seven times on the first page alone, and forty-six times in the last nineteen pages.

Professor Dewey freely admits that every important religion is forced to face the problem of whether the supernatural exists or not, and he proposes the adoption of a "religion" which is to be "*separated from the supernatural and all the things that have grown up about it*." I shall try to show," says Professor Dewey, "that these derivations are encumbrances and that what is genuinely religious will undergo an emancipation when it is relieved from them." In fact, Professor Dewey goes so far as to say, and no doubt many who read this book will be astonished at his boldness in this matter, that, he "cannot understand how



any realization of the democratic ideal as a vital moral and spiritual ideal in human affairs is possible without surrender of the conception of the basic division to which supernatural Christianity is committed!"<sup>2</sup>

Dr. John Herman Randall, Jr., also of the department of Philosophy in Columbia University, since 1925, boldly says that, "The liberal of our day is bound to see that there is no place in his thought for the old conceptions of supernaturalism and miracles, for the old idea of an infallible revelation in a transcendental realm of final religious or moral truth, for the popular notions of God in which generations have professed to believe, or for the literal truth of any of the religious doctrines that come down from a far away past."<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Harry Elmer Barnes, lecturer in, and later, Professor of Sociology in Smith College, from 1923 to 1930, lecturer in History in the New School for Social Research intermittently since 1919, the author of a great number of historical books, and, in 1928, Vice-President of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, undoubtedly one of the bitterest antagonists of Christianity in our generation, begins his late work *The Twilight of Christianity*, with a sweeping and more or less vicious denial of even the possibility of anything supernatural ever occurring in human history. After reading the book through, I discover that Dr. Barnes nowhere gives his *reasons* for such a wholesale denunciation of everything in any way relating to the supernatural and to God. These are his words:

"The chief thesis which the writer desires to advance is that the old supernatural concepts and criteria relating to human conduct and its objectives should be discredited and abolished as rapidly as possible, and supplanted by strictly secular and mundane considerations. He is willing to defend secularism to any extreme and against all comers from the supernatural camp. As far as the writer is interested in either attacking religion or sup-

porting religion, *the whole issue revolves about the degree to which the particular religion concerned espouses the secular or the supernatural position. The writer is unalterably opposed to all vestiges of the old supernaturalism* (italics ours), with its distorted and rudimentary views of the universe, God, man, and human life. . . .

"We are now in possession of a body of knowledge" (Dr. Barnes does not anywhere indicate what this body of knowledge is) "and a resulting set of intellectual and social attitudes which offer a complete challenge, not merely to orthodox Catholicism or Fundamentalist Protestantism, but to supernatural religions of every sort whatever. There has never been any religious crisis of this kind before . . . However much religion may, in the past, have been concerned with the so-called supernatural world, there is not the slightest evidence of the operation of actual supernatural factors in the origin and development of religion . . . *The premises of the old supernaturalism have completely evaporated.*"<sup>4</sup>

When such men of world-wide influence as the late Professor J. D. Bury, and Dr. John Dewey, together with men who, though not as famous, have held chairs in prominent universities in our country for decades, as Dr. John Herman Randall, Jr., and Professor Harry Elmer Barnes, all unite, and we fear they are but true representatives of our university faculties today, in such a sweeping, uncompromising denial of all that might be called supernatural, it is high time for those of us who confess a supernatural faith to at least reexamine the foundations on which we stand. It is impossible to simply laugh out of court the verdicts of such men as these, primarily because thousands and thousands of educated people are today accepting their verdicts.

### THE SUPERNATURAL DEFINED

Probably before we go any further in our discussion of this subject, it might be well to come to some common



agreement as to what we mean by "the supernatural." We have allowed ourselves to present these various statements denying the reality of the supernatural because almost anyone has some more or less *vague* idea of what is meant by this word. But we must have a very definite and clear idea of the meaning of the word, if we are in any way to come to some definite conclusion ourselves as to whether there is sufficient evidence for believing in the manifestation of the supernatural to men.

The word itself is a very simple one, and means, fundamentally, *that which is above, or beyond, nature*. It has an altogether different meaning than the word "superhuman." Much that is distinctly superhuman is still definitely natural. The terrific hurricane which fell upon the New England Coast in the Fall of 1938, was certainly superhuman, neither originated by, nor under the control of any man, or any group of men, but it was not supernatural, being very definitely, though perhaps we might say abnormally, *natural*. The power that streams from the sun is superhuman, but it is still natural. If then anything is truly supernatural, it must be above everything in nature, i.e., it must be an event, or a fact, originating from and manifesting the power and wisdom of something above nature, which means also something above the power and wisdom of man. This is only part of a definition of the supernatural, however.

The late Professor J. Gresham Machen, the most scholarly defender of supernaturalism in our country during the last quarter of a century, and recognized by the entire school of modern theology, both in this country and abroad, as a man whose writings and convictions rested upon years of careful research, who in all of his statements was fair and trustworthy, defines the supernatural as follows: "A supernatural event is one that takes place by the immediate, as distinguished from the medial power of God. The possibility of the supernatural, if the supernatural be defined



in this way, presupposes two things. It presupposes (1) the existence of a personal God, and (2) the existence of a real order of nature . . . Without the existence of an order of nature there could be no distinction between natural events and those that are above nature, all events would be supernatural, or rather the word 'supernatural' would have no meaning at all."<sup>5</sup>

It is hardly possible to speak of the supernatural without at the same time postulating the idea of a personal and powerful God. If there is anything in all the world *above* nature, and that means also above the spirit that dwells in man, that which is above nature and thus above all in nature itself, if terms mean anything, there must be a *God*. This all students admit, whether they believe in or positively deny the existence of the supernatural. No one, today, is arguing against the supernatural and at the same time holding that the supernatural could mean anything less than the existence of a living God. Or, to put it another way, a person who denies the possibility of the supernatural, denies also the reality of a living, personal God.

As has been pointed out by a very careful English scholar, whose work on this subject is of considerable value, "There is no room for the supernatural in the proper sense of the word, in so-called religion which emanates solely from the subjective consciousness of the individual, or of the race, . . . nor is there room for the supernatural in any system with a pantheistic implication."<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, then, supernaturalism is the belief that some events in human history can only be accounted for on the assumption that a supreme being, none other than God himself, has caused these particular events to occur. To deny the supernatural, as is being done by such a great number of intellectual leaders today, is to emphatically refuse to believe that any event in history has occurred except exclusively by natural causes, by the result of natural laws, even though perhaps these laws may not be

wholly known. Supernaturalism is the direct opposite of a naturalistic philosophy of life.

### CHRISTIANITY EMPHATICALLY A SUPERNATURAL RELIGION

There are many religions in the world which can make no claim to divine origin. There are some religions in the world which insist upon no particular supernatural events to sustain their particular system of truth (or error). Not so Christianity. It is, of all religions in the world, the most distinctly supernaturalistic. In fact, its supernaturalism is the very thing that separates it, by a great chasm, from all the other religions of history. It is its supernaturalism which has given it its power through the ages, and its great victories over the religions with which it has come in contact. *The supernaturalism of Christianity rests distinctly and solidly upon the supernaturalism of its founder, Jesus Christ.* The supernaturalism of Christ is found revealed in greatest detail in the four gospels, which begin our New Testament. Whether these records are trustworthy or not (and this we will examine later), at least they reveal to us a person, Jesus, who they claim, came into the world by a supernatural birth, conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. They reveal one who is said to have been able to cast out demons, to make the lame walk, to open the eyes of the blind, to turn water into wine, to multiply a handful of food so that it was sufficient for feeding five thousand people, to quiet a stormy sea by a mere spoken word, and to raise the dead. This person is said, in the gospels, to have undergone an experience known as the Transfiguration, by which His whole being was illumined with a divine light, and a voice was heard from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son." This same person, Jesus, after dying on a cross outside of the city of Jerusalem, and laid away in a near-by tomb, rose from the dead, as He predicted He would, on the



third day after His death, showing Himself to His followers, and convincing them that in His own body he had come out from the tomb. These are, we might say, the four primary, supreme supernatural aspects of Christ's life, though we might speak of others, such as the supernaturalness of His sinless character, the supernatural wisdom revealed in His remarkable prophecies, and His Ascension into heaven forty days after His Resurrection. In this volume, however, we will confine our attention exclusively to the four supernatural events which we first enumerated.

The Christian believes in a supernatural experience called Regeneration, in a supernatural redemption, in a supernatural judgment to come, in a supernatural resurrection for all believers, and in a supernatural gathering of all Christ's followers to Himself in heaven. Most emphatically the faith which the Christian Church has taught for nineteen hundred years is a supernatural one. Whether the church has been right or wrong, whether there is sufficient evidence for believing these events to be supernatural, whether our supernatural faith must in this modern day be given up, are problems which we intend to face in the following chapters. But that the New Testament does present a supernatural Christ, no one can deny. The records may be repudiated, or men may attempt to explain away the supernatural elements found in these records; but certainly no rational person, even one of a definite agnostic position, can deny that the New Testament records of Christ's life on earth are from beginning to end interpenetrated with the supernatural. If the evidence is adequate for persuading us that certain events in the life of Christ, while He was on earth, can only be accounted for by acknowledging a divine intervention in history, by the recognition of a power beyond and above all natural law, then the fact of supernaturalism is established. If these records do not establish the reality of supernaturalism in the life of Christ, there is no need of discussing any other miracles of



the Scriptures. If we do not have a supernatural Christ, then it is useless to talk about a supernatural revelation. If we do not have a supernatural Christ, it is foolish to speak of a supernatural redemption through Christ. If Christ is not supernatural, it will be admitted that no one else and nothing else in the world can be.

#### SOME REASONS THAT HAVE BEEN SUGGESTED WHY BELIEF IN THE SUPERNATURAL MUST BE ABANDONED

Many Christians who have opened this volume will, in reading this far, now be asking themselves the question, What possible reason or reasons can there be for anyone's denying the supernatural? Furthermore, if some who are in their own minds persuaded that there cannot be, and has not been, any supernatural event in human history, should be reading these pages, and we hope many will, perhaps they have not themselves really thought through the question, *Why* do I reject the supernatural? We are convinced that there are great multitudes of people today, and many of them well-educated people, who are only opposed to supernaturalism because others are, or because they think it bespeaks a scientific mind, or because they have felt that the things they learned at school destroyed the very foundations for believing in the supernatural, or because some great scholar for whom they have profound respect, has himself repudiated the supernatural, but still their minds are vague as to any definite *reason* why supernatural events could not occur.

It has been an amazing experience for the author to discover, after reading literally thousands of pages of anti-supernaturalistic literature, that hardly any of our contemporary thinkers who express themselves so emphatically against the supernatural give us any *reasons* for their convictions in this regard. In fact, though there must be chapters, and perhaps whole books, devoted to this one

particular point, I have been able to discover only one single brief treatment written during the twentieth century setting forth the *reasons* why belief in the supernatural must be given up.

Before classifying such reasons, we want to enter a strong protest against all those writers who simply sweep the whole question of the supernatural aside, as though it were something to be dismissed with the wave of a hand, as though intelligent men of modern times could not for one moment accept a Christ of supernaturalistic aspects. Thus, for instance, Ernest Renan, the great French scholar and arch-modernist, says in the introduction to his famous *Life of Jesus*, "Let the gospels be in part legendary, that is evident since they are full of miracles and the supernatural."<sup>7</sup> That is a very unfair way of considering the intelligence of one's readers. It assumes that the miraculous simply cannot be believed, without giving any grounds for the assumption whatever.

A much greater scholar than Renan, whose writings have had more influence over Christian literature, we regret to say, than those of any other one New Testament scholar during the last forty years, a strict anti-supernaturalist and rationalist, is guilty of the same intellectual dishonesty as Renan. I refer to the late Professor Adolf Harnack, who in his epochal work, *What Is Christianity?*, a work arising out of a series of lectures which he delivered in the University of Berlin in the winter of 1899 and 1900, has dared to put himself on record as saying, "That a storm was quieted by a word, we do not believe, and *we shall never again believe*."<sup>8</sup> Why, he does not say.

The only real discussion of the question of *why* men of this modern age must give up their belief in the supernatural, as far as I have been able to discover, though there certainly must be many other pages on this problem, is an eleven-page summary in a fairly recent work, by Dr. William Pepperell Montague, a member of the Department



of Philosophy in Columbia University for the last forty years, and full Professor of Philosophy in Columbia since 1920. The work to which we refer, *Belief Unbound*, also comprises, like Professor Dewey's book, lectures given on the Terry Foundation at Yale University.

We have been told by prominent philosophers in our country, whether the statement is exaggerated or not, we do not know, that Dr. Montague may be called "the philosopher's philosopher," and is regarded in Columbia University as one of the outstanding philosophic scholars of our day. In this brief discussion of the question of the supernatural, Professor Montague sets forth three reasons why (so he affirms) men today must give up their faith in the supernatural. By this he does not only mean men must disbelieve that certain miracles have taken place, but he actually insists we must give up our very faith in the God of the Bible. We feel it necessary to give careful consideration to Professor Montague's arguments. If they are found vulnerable, then we can proceed with our discussion. The first reason he gives is as follows:

"The size of the world in space and its duration in time have been extended beyond all resemblance to the dimensions accepted by the Church Fathers . . . Though the spatio-temporal expansions of modern astronomic and evolutionary science do not render impossible the core of Christian metaphysics, they do quite definitely destroy such concomitants as the cosmogony and chronology of the Bible, and its cosmographic conceptions of Heaven and Hell."

To begin with, everyone must admit that *the subject of Bible chronology has nothing to do with the supernatural*. Furthermore, the Bible was not written as a scientific textbook, and is not so to be used, e.g., for teaching astronomy. Nevertheless, there are no astronomical statements in the Bible which are contradicted by modern science. Scientists today know a much greater universe than the Hebrew people ever dreamed of, but these Hebrew people never told



us how large the world was, and the pages of the Word of God are remarkably elastic in this respect. Furthermore, the subject of Heaven and Hell has nothing to do with the miracles of the gospel records of which we are about to speak. Of course, if there is no such person as the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, then, of course, there is no Heaven or Hell; but, if the life of our Lord on earth was a true manifestation of the supernatural, and He spoke of Heaven and Hell, it well behooves us to hearken to the exhortation from Heaven, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him." This particular reason of Professor Montague's is really a flimsy affair, and is not *convincing* if one is really looking for sound *reasons* in this matter.

The second reason set forth by Professor Montague is as follows:

"The aspect of modern knowledge that counts much more seriously against Christian supernaturalism than the enlargement of the universe is . . . the indifference of her structure and processes to us and our planet that really matter. The better we understand the laws of nature, the more indifferent to our weal and woe do they appear. In the light of all this, there are many who feel that the assumption of any sort of a personal God with a humanlike love for human animals is immeasurably absurd, and explainable only as a relic of primitive ignorance and fear."

Now this volume is not written to answer these philosophic speculations of Professor Montague, and he is a far greater scholar than the author of this volume ever could be, but I wonder if my readers, whether they are Christians or not, would not agree with me immediately that in these lines Professor Montague has not kept to the truth, as it pertains to life and nature. *Is not our world kind to us? Does the air that we breathe stab our lungs with pain, or cool our blood and purify our bodies? Does the cool water which we drink from a bubbling brook, or a faucet in our apartment, quench or multiply thirst; does it delight us as we drink it or does it give us pain as it touches our tongues? It is neces-*

sary for us to eat, but is it not true that the eating of food, if wholesome and well cooked, is a delightful experience for all of us, three times a day, for all the years we remain on earth? Is love not something beautiful, and sweet, and heavenly, if we may use such a word? Do not our eyes rejoice in the beauties of nature, and our ears in the harmonies of music? Has not nature ways of healing our bodies, even when the intervention of a surgeon is necessary? Is it not true that a dangerous gas is immediately detected by our nostrils, and food that would poison us, by our tongues? Is it not true that, when we are driving a car, our eyes keep us from smashing into others, or from running over a precipice? Without going any further into this argument, may I take the liberty here of recommending a remarkable book, published some years ago (1913) by a distinguished scientist of our country, Professor Lawrence J. Henderson, a member of the Department of Chemistry in Harvard University since 1904, and full Professor of Chemistry in Harvard since 1919, Leyden Lecturer at the University of Berlin in 1928, and Exchange Professor in the University of Paris in 1921. The name of the book is *The Fitness of the Environment*. It contains some marvelous chapters on the relationship of the world in which we live to our physical needs. The whole volume is a smashing answer to Professor Montague's unfair and inaccurate charges. Also, it should be carefully noted that by his phrase "there are many" our learned author acknowledges that there are hosts of others who do not agree with him here.

The last argument which Professor Montague presents in his attack upon supernaturalism, he makes to be

"based on the materialistic or mechanistic conception of mind and life. In one region after another in which effects once seemed to necessitate internal and purposeful causes of a conscious if not supernatural character, there have been found natural causes of an external quantitative and unpurposive kind which seem to be adequate. And the plausible inference is ad-



vanced that if we knew more of the facts of nature, we should be able to explain all by the methods which have already explained so much. Mind and its processes vary concomitantly with matter and its processes, therefore mind is a function of matter dependent upon its mechanistic laws and inseparable from its admittedly perishable aggregates." <sup>9</sup>

Now there have been a number of philosophers, and also a goodly number of scientists, who have adopted this very mechanistic view of life which Professor Montague here sets forth, but it cannot be denied that there is today a very definite drift away from this mechanistic philosophy, and most scientists are at the present time emphatic in repudiating its validity.

We take the liberty here of giving an extended remark on the absolute inadequacy of the mechanistic view of the world which Professor Montague seems to speak of as an accepted conclusion of modern science, which it most emphatically is not, by one of the outstanding scientists of our generation, Professor J. S. Haldane. Professor Haldane has been engaged in scientific research and teaching since 1885; was formerly Reader in Psychology in Oxford University, and from 1924-1928, was President of the Institute of Mining Engineers. He is distinctly not a Christian, being for some years an active, outstanding member of the Rationalist Press Association of Great Britain.

"Now it seems to me that when we regard biological phenomena from a purely scientific standpoint it is quite impossible to accept the mechanistic interpretation, and for the following reasons. The characteristic feature of the phenomena of life is that these phenomena, whether of structure or activity, tend, in the case of any particular species of organism, to persist and reproduce themselves as a whole. When, moreover, we examine the details of structure, environment, and activity, we find that they are so coordinated or connected together that as a net outcome the life of the organism or its kind tends to be maintained. The life-conserving coordination appears as of the essence of life . . .

The coordinated maintenance or wholeness is always there: we cannot, in our observations of life, separate organism from environment, or structure from its activity, since the moment we attempt to do so we are neglecting the coordinated maintenance which is always present. In what we interpret as a mechanical system we may have mutual determination or coordination of parts, but not persistent maintenance and reproduction. This distinguishes life from any mechanically interpreted system, however delicate and complex it may be; and from the physical standpoint life is nothing less than a standing miracle. Neither the physical conception of causation or mutual determination, nor the mathematical conception of mutual externality, fits our experience of life . . . The progress of biology is just the progressive discovery of the nature of lives as such, and never the discovery of what can be more than very imperfectly interpreted as physico-chemical mechanism.

"It was formerly supposed very generally by those who believed in the possibility of a mechanistic interpretation of life that the process of natural selection accounts for the characteristic features of life as contrasted with what we ordinarily interpret as physico-chemical mechanism. But this supposition breaks down at once as soon as we reflect that the whole theory of natural selection is based on the fact of hereditary transmission, which itself implies the distinguishing feature of life as coordinated unity always tending to maintain and reproduce itself. This applies also to the variations which are an essential feature in the theory of natural selection. Thus natural selection affords no help whatever to a mechanistic interpretation of life . . .

"It has also been supposed that it is only because of the extreme complexity of the physico-chemical processes of life that we have hitherto met with so little success in analysing life into physico-chemical mechanism. Coupled with this supposition is the confident assertion that by the application of physical and chemical methods to the phenomena of life we are making gradual progress towards a physical and chemical interpretation of life. In the development of physiology, in either recent or former times, I can, however, find no trace of progress in this direction; and I speak as one who has been for very many years engaged actively in physiological research, particularly with the help of chemical



methods. By experimental investigation we are constantly adding to our knowledge of life. But what we are finding in this way is more and more of what is characteristic of life, not what we can interpret as mechanism, unless indeed we deliberately leave out of account the staring facts which stamp the features of life on the phenomena. This leaving out of account is, as it seems to me, simply bad physiology. Biology as a coherent body of knowledge is always seeking for and finding the coordinated maintenance which is characteristic of life.

"Biology has nothing directly to do with religion, and by no possibility can religion, such as we know, be based on biology; but the fact that biology bars decisively the door against a final mechanistic or mathematical interpretation of our experience is at least very significant in connection with our ideas as to religion."<sup>10</sup>

Of course it is needless to say that the testimony of Professor Haldane regarding matters pertaining to *science* is far more trustworthy than that of Professor Montague, who is a philosopher and not a scientist.

The distinguished astronomer, Sir James Jeans, shows how far from true scientific opinion today Professor Montague's mechanistic theory actually is, in the following words, "Today there is a wide measure of agreement which, on the physical side of science, approaches almost to unanimity that the stream of knowledge is heading towards a non-mechanical reality; the universe begins to look more like a great thought than like a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter; we are beginning to suspect that we ought rather to hail it as the creator and governor of the realm of matter . . . we discover that the Universe shows evidence of a designing or controlling power that has something in common with our own individual minds."

I think we must at least acknowledge, whatever our particular beliefs in the supernatural might be, that the reasons presented by Professor Montague will not stand close scrutiny, and are not what we may speak of as *facts*, but

only theories and speculations, with which many, possessing in their fields a scholarship as great as Professor Montague's, would radically disagree.

There is one more argument against the supernatural, quite an amazing one, found not in Professor Montague's book, but in the related volume by Professor Dewey from which we have quoted above. This is one of the strangest arguments against the supernatural, if not the strangest, anyone could ever conceive. We allow Professor Dewey to present it in his own words:

"The objection to supernaturalism is that it stands in the way of an effective realization of the sweep and depth of the implications of natural human relations. It stands in the way of using the means that are in our power to make radical changes in these relations. It is certainly true that great material changes might be made with no corresponding improvement of a spiritual or ideal nature. But development in the latter direction cannot be introduced from without; it cannot be brought about by dressing up material and economic changes with decorations derived from the supernatural. It can come only from more intense realization of values that inhere in the actual connections of human beings with one another. The attempt to segregate the implicit public interest and social value of all institutions and social arrangements in a particular organization is a fatal diversion."<sup>12</sup>

When it is said, as Professor Dewey here really says, that belief in the supernatural has been, as it were, a detriment to man, and a corrupting force in civilization, all we would say is that almost the entire world, outside of adherents to communism, would agree that the most uplifting, cleansing, inspiring, encouraging, strengthening power that has ever entered into the human race is the Christian faith, and all that it involves regarding the supernatural. There may be a *denial* of this, but there is no *evidence* to contradict it, and we do not intend to waste space in this book supporting a truth to which almost every historian testifies. We feel that when a person like Pro-



fessor Dewey is driven to such an argument as this, in his attempt to destroy confidence in the supernatural, he is in a desperate situation indeed to discover some grounds for contending against this truth.

Not one of these arguments, of Professor Montague or Professor Dewey, against the supernatural, rest on facts, nor are they the unanimous verdicts of modern science. They are theories, speculative interpretations, and certainly, in part if not in whole, determined by the atheistic prejudices of these men. If some men will not believe that God lives, they must not believe in the supernatural; being *forced* to deny the reality of supernatural manifestation, they are driven to create such theories as we have just been considering. But after all, the reality of the supernatural, at least as we hope to discuss it in this volume, that is, the manifestation of the supernatural in the life of Christ on earth, is not something to be decided upon by theories, but by *evidence*. If there is indisputable *evidence* for supernatural events in Christ's life on earth, then no anti-supernaturalistic *theory* can ever shake one's conviction in the reality of such supernaturalistic phenomenon. It is *evidence* we want, and not theories. If there is no evidence for the supernatural in the gospel records, then we need no theories to disprove that for which we have no evidence for believing. We discard the supernatural, if there is no evidence for it, without argument (though with grief). If there is evidence for the supernatural, then philosophic debate carried on for a thousand years, by the keenest intellects imaginable, cannot disturb that rock foundation of truth, composed of indisputable facts. The purpose of this entire volume is at least to face and obtain an affirmative answer to the question: Do the gospels present adequate evidence for our believing in the supernaturalness of Christ?

In addition to these reasons offered by Dr. Montague and Professor Dewey for insisting upon the repudiation of the supernatural, there is another we must not forget, namely,

that *we are living in an age tragically marked by sheer unbelief*, the refusal to believe in anything spiritual or moral, in God, in moral law, in sin, in judgment, in truth for truth's sake. As Walter Lippmann in his profound work, *A Preface to Morals*, has said, "This is the first age in the history of mankind when the circumstances of life have conspired with the intellectual habits of the time to render any fixed and authoritative belief incredible to large masses of men. The irreligion of the modern world is radical to a degree for which there is, I think, no counterpart . . . Just as men (in former ages) would surmount any difficulty when their passion to believe was wholehearted, so today, when the passion to disbelieve is so strong they are unable to believe no matter how perfectly their theoretical dilemmas are resolved."<sup>13</sup> It is hard to imagine anything sadder than such a condition of which Mr. Lippmann speaks, that men today are "*unable to believe*." Why they are unable is a question into which we do not enter at this time. That they *are* unable to believe, or at least are not believing, is something all recognize as true.

Another reason for denying the supernatural is the disbelief in God which is so prevalent today—sheer atheism, if one will allow me to use a hideous word for a hideous truth. We quoted at the beginning of this book a line from Professor Randall, Jr., of Columbia University, in which he so sweepingly denied the reality of the supernatural. We should also remember that the same professor has said, in the same work, that "there is no room for a God save in the aspirations and imaginations of men."<sup>14</sup>

In reading Professor Barnes' denial of the supernatural, we should also remember he, too, has said that "modern science has shown it to be difficult to prove the very existence of God, and even more of a problem to show any direct solicitude of God for our petty and ephemeral planet."<sup>15</sup>

That Professor Montague, also, is a radical disbeliever in God is proved by what we would emphatically call a



blasphemous sentence in the book above referred to. "Zeus and his cousin of old Judea never were at all except as nightmare dreams in the minds of their worshippers."<sup>16</sup>

If supernaturalism implies a living God, then if men refuse to believe in God, they are forced to deny the reality of any supernaturalistic event. In fact, to admit a supernatural intervention in history would be to prove to them that they are wholly wrong in their atheistic position. When a man has taken the position that either God does not exist, or God cannot be known, and that God has not revealed Himself to man in any way, that person is *compelled* to be an antisupernaturalist. My own feeling in the matter is that many men are antisupernaturalists because they do not *want* to believe that God has spoken to men, for to believe that, would involve a complete revolution in their thinking and their conduct.

There is probably another reason for this general antagonism toward supernaturalism, one that is very rarely thought of by most of us, and yet which has in it, I am persuaded, the profoundest significance. Those of us who read the New Testament with any frequency are aware that it often speaks of the antagonism of the *world* itself (i.e., the great mass of mankind outside of the church) toward the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, and toward the life of which the Christian faith speaks. For myself, it took an essay of the distinguished former Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University, George Santayana, an agnostic certainly, if perhaps not an atheist, to make me aware of this particular aspect of our subject. Professor Santayana, in the very chapter we are about to quote from, frankly reveals his own radical repudiation of the idea that the Bible is in any way a remarkable volume, when he writes,

"It seems to many of us that Christianity is indeed a fable, yet full of meaning, if you take it as such; for what scraps of historical truth there may be in the Bible are of little importance."

The passage we are most interested in, at this point, is the following:

"In every age in which a supernaturalistic system is preached we must accordingly expect to find the world standing up stubbornly against it, essentially unconverted and hostile, whatever name it may have been christened with; and we may expect the spirit of the world to find expression not only in overt opposition to the supernaturalistic system, but also in the surviving or supervening worldliness of the faithful. Such an insidious revulsion of the natural man against a religion he does not openly discard, is what, in modern Christendom, we call the Renaissance . . . The modernist wishes to reconcile the church and the world, therein he forgets what Christianity came into the world to announce and why its message was believed. It came to announce salvation from the world. Having no ears for this essential message of Christianity, the modernist also has no eyes for its history."<sup>17</sup>

Forty years ago, the great Calvinist, Professor B. B. Warfield, clearly foretold what was coming, in a warning which he issued to the entire Christian Church, and because probably few eyes that read these pages have read these particular words of his, I should like to repeat them here: "Christian men are men first and Christians afterwards: and therefore their Christian thinking is superinduced on a basis of world-thinking. . . . Immersed in an antisupernaturalistic world atmosphere, Christian thinking tends to become as antisupernaturalistic as is possible to it . . . The effort is not to Christianize the world's conception of the age, but specifically to desupernaturalize a Christianity so as to bring it into accord with the prevailing world view."<sup>18</sup>

### THREE POSSIBLE ATTITUDES TOWARD SUPERNATURALISM

Some decision regarding supernaturalism must be made by any intelligent man who attempts to find his way through the chaos of modern thought, who attempts to discover a way of truth, who is looking for satisfying reality and



certainty, who desires to build his life upon a rock which nothing can move. There are only three possible attitudes which one may take toward supernaturalism, and it would seem every thinking person must take one or another of them. First, one may utterly repudiate supernaturalism, either by giving careful study to the entire subject and coming to a personal decision of one's own; or by being the slave to some antisupernaturalistic thinker; or by allowing one's self to be prejudiced against supernaturalism because one does not want to believe in a living God, because one does not want to believe that Jesus Christ came from God, because one does not want to adjust his life to the revolutionary truths which his supernaturalistic view of the world necessarily involves. Secondly, one may desire to hold on to what he calls the "inner" truths of the Christian faith, the teachings, and character, and moral ideals of Jesus, but strip the Christian faith of all of its supernaturalistic elements. Thirdly, he may courageously stand in the front line trenches of a supernaturalistic faith, firmly believing in it, continually defending it, and repeatedly re-examining the foundations for his own persuasion, ever increasingly convinced of the sufficiency of the evidence supporting his convictions.

We have already in this chapter seen enough of the position of those men who stand in the first group. We might, for a moment, listen to one of the outstanding scientists of our day, who belongs to the second group, while he unfolds to us his conception of the compromise which the Christian church must now make with an antisupernaturalistic age, in giving up all of those aspects of its rich heritage which speak of divine intervention in history. We refer to Professor J. S. Haldane, from whom we have quoted above. The quotation is long, but correspondingly important, stating what many others in a poorer way, have tried to say, and what, we fear, many more will be declaiming during the next few years.

PROFESSOR HALDANE'S PLEA TO STRIP CHRISTIANITY OF  
ALL ITS SUPERNATURALISTIC ELEMENTS

"A very large and increasing body of persons who have studied or been influenced by one branch or another of science find themselves unable to belong to any recognized Church, because *they cannot accept any form of belief in what is supernatural. It is to this body that I myself belong*, . . . No one can feel more strongly than I do that religion is the greatest thing in life, and that behind the recognized Churches there is an unrecognized Church to which all may belong, though supernatural events play no part in its creed.

"Belief in supernatural events is just the complement of the materialism associated with theology, though not with religion itself. If once we admit, as theologians have done, that the visible world is actually a material world, then supernatural events of various sorts have to be called in to justify religious belief. Supernatural creation, supernatural revelation, supernatural raising from the dead, and even supernatural action of the soul on the body, all become necessary. My own wish to see belief in the supernatural dissociated entirely from religion is only part of a wish to see materialism dissociated from it. The materialism with which orthodox theology is at present shot through and through is the whole source of the weakness of religious belief in presence of the sciences, and of the alienation between religious belief and the sciences.

"I think there can be no doubt that scientific men as a body will continue to oppose religious beliefs in so far as these beliefs are associated with any element of what is known as the supernatural; and it may be long before the supernatural element is eliminated from religion as represented by the Churches. I can, however, see no final obstacle to this elimination. The Churches, purged from materialistic theology, will then stand united for belief in God, communion with God, and all the strength, steadfastness and Christian charity which true religion carries with it . . .

"Religion has always been in practice, a general philosophy of conscious behavior, and it has stood for the reality of the spiritual interpretation of reality, without neglecting the sin and suffering



which appear to be around us on every side . . . Christian theology hardly appeals to those holding sincere religious beliefs of different historical origins from ours, or even to more than a section, though still a large one, of our own countrymen, or of other persons of European stock. Nevertheless the Founder of Christianity intended it to appeal to all men, and it seems to me that it would be only in the spirit of that Founder to purge Christian theology of everything that prevents it from making a universal appeal, to which men of science and those belonging to other civilizations can respond just as well as those to whom the present form of Christian theology or some other theology appeals." (What a subtle sentence, so full of the most deliberate misinterpretation of our Lord's own relation to the supernatural.)

"What the sciences can rightfully ask for from the Church is that its creed should be so amended as not to exclude those who, while accepting the great truths of religion, are unable to accept supernatural beliefs."<sup>19</sup>

#### A PLEA FOR AN UNPREJUDICED EXAMINATION OF THE EVIDENCE FOR THE SUPERNATURALNESS OF CHRIST

It is the purpose of this book, in the following chapters, to persuade especially young men and women of this generation to take their stand in the third group, namely, among those giants of the church of every age who, faithfully, firmly, fearlessly, as scholars, as men of learning, as clear thinkers, as those who are looking for the truth and for unshakeable realities, who in every age, have gladly confessed their faith in a supernatural Christ, supernaturally born, accomplishing supernatural miracles, undergoing a supernatural Transfiguration, and experiencing a supernatural Resurrection from the dead. One thing every young person of this generation should determine, namely, that he will give careful, unprejudiced consideration to *evidence*, and that he will not be driven into any position regarding this pre-eminent question of supernaturalism by the greatness of some scholar's reputation, by the mere edict of an un-

believing scientist, by the very spirit of unbelief in the midst of which he lives, but that in this matter, he will come to his own personal conclusion, and be able to give a reason himself either for the despair or for the hope that is within him.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Bury: *A History of Freedom of Thought*, New York and London, 1913 (Home University Library), p. 172. See an excellent chapter, "The Challenging of the Supernatural," in Henry C. Sheldon: *Unbelief in the Nineteenth Century*, New York, 1907, pp. 153-180.

<sup>2</sup> John Dewey: *A Common Faith*, New Haven, 1934, pp. 2, 84. It may be that some of our readers would like to know what definition Professor Dewey would give to his new religion. This is it, if you are able to understand what he means—the author of the book you are now reading regrets he does not understand what Professor Dewey means, though he comforts himself in discovering that there are a great many other people in America who seem to be just as stupid as he in this matter. Here is Professor Dewey's definition: "I should describe this faith as the unification of the self through allegiance to inclusive ideal ends, which imagination presents to us and to which the human will responds as worthy of controlling our desires and choices." P. 33.

<sup>3</sup> John Herman Randall and John Herman Randall, Jr.: *Religion and the Modern World*, New York, 1939, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> Harry Elmer Barnes: *The Twilight of Christianity*, New York, 1929, pp. v, vi, 25. Reprinted with the kind permission of the author, Professor Barnes. W. Macneile Dixon, Professor of the English Language and Literature in the University of Glasgow since 1904, in his Gifford Lectures of 1935-1937, now published in his latest volume, *The Human Situation* (London, New York, 1937), says: "Briefly and broadly the issue is what it has always been, and always will be, the age-long issue between Naturalism and Supernaturalism. . . . All enquiries lead to the one enquiry" (p. 22). Professor Dixon, who says (p. 12), "We have on this journey to part company with the friends of revealed religion," pessimistically declares, "We are wholly in the dark about everything." This volume is wholly antisupernaturalistic, and the fact that it has received such high praise from so many



scholars in the English world, without criticism of its paganism, is a sad omen. As this book is going through the press, an amazing proof of the increasing denial of the supernatural has been given us—the recent words of Dr. Einstein, that “In their struggle for the ethical good, teachers of religion must have the stature to give up the doctrine of a personal God.” This is positive atheism.

<sup>5</sup> J. Gresham Machen: *Christianity and Liberalism*, New York, 1923, p. 99.

<sup>6</sup> L. V. Lester-Garland, *The Idea of the Supernatural*, London, 1934, p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Renan: *The Life of Jesus*, American edition, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> A. Harnack: *What Is Christianity?* English trans., 2d ed., New York, 1901, p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> William Pepperell Montague: *Belief Unbound. A Promethean Religion for the Modern World*, New Haven, 1930, pp. 21–25.

<sup>10</sup> J. S. Haldane, in *Science and Religion. A Symposium*. With a Foreword by Michael Pupin. New York, 1931, pp. 38–40, 43. The same author in his Gifford Lectures (1927–1928) makes the remarkable prediction that “the time is not far distant when our ancestors will look back with wonder at the materialistic substitution; for materialism is nothing better than a substitution on the same level as a belief in witches.” *The Sciences and Philosophy*, 1929, p. 335. See also the remarks by Sir Arthur Eddington in the same volume, pp. 125, 126.

<sup>11</sup> Sir James Jeans: *The Mysterious Universe*, London, 1930, pp. 148, 149.

<sup>12</sup> John Dewey, *ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>13</sup> Walter Lippmann: *A Preface to Morals*, New York, 1929, pp. 12, 54.

<sup>14</sup> John Herman Randall and J. H. Randall, Jr., *ibid.*, p. 66. We had no deliberate intention, when quoting from some of the outstanding antisupernaturalistic philosophers of our day, to quote from three who were teaching in any one institution, but it so happens that we have referred to the writings of three prominent and influential scholars in the Department of Philosophy in Columbia University. Professor Montague has taught at Columbia for thirty-seven years; Professor Dewey for the same length of time; Professor Randall for fifteen years. Must we not conclude that the attitude of the Department of Philosophy in this great center of education is dominantly atheistic, and most emphatically antisupernaturalistic? What we are thinking of is the thousands and thousands of public school teachers, and

teachers in our higher institutions of learning all over America, who have sat at the feet of these men throughout this century, imbibing their atheistic ideas, and carrying them home to re-plant this poisonous seed in the hearts of millions of pupils whom they have, in turn, been teaching during the four decades of our century. This book is not written in any way to find fault with the leading philosophers and educators of our country but when one realizes that thousands of school teachers all over the country take their religious convictions and their attitudes toward life and God from these distinguished philosophers at Columbia University—Dr. Randall, Professor Dewey, and Professor Montague—one is not surprised at the awful wave of unbelief and skepticism that is sweeping across our country. What else could one expect? Unless we have a real revival sent down from heaven, this situation will get worse instead of better. Since this volume was finished, Mr. Bertrand Russell, the English philosopher, and atheist, has been invited to become Professor of Philosophy at City College, New York, an appointment which aroused such strong opposition that the appointment was recalled.

<sup>15</sup> Harry Elmer Barnes: "Medical Science versus Religion as a Guide to Life," an address before the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Dec. 29, 1928; from the *New York Times*, Dec. 30, 1928, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> W. P. Montague, *ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> George Santayana: *Winds of Doctrine. Studies in Contemporary Opinion*. London and New York, 1913, pp. 50, 54, 35.

<sup>18</sup> B. B. Warfield, "Christian Supernaturalism," in *Presbyterian and Reformed Review*, Jan., 1897, VIII, 61.

<sup>19</sup> J. S. Haldane: *The Sciences and Philosophy*, Garden City, New York, 1929, pp. 296, 302, 305. Just as a revelation of how great scholars working with theories and not with facts can so radically disagree, the following sentence of Professor Santayana proves an interesting contrast to the verdict of Professor Haldane. "In a frank supernaturalism . . . not in a pleasant secularization lies the sole hope of the church. Its sole dignity also lies here . . . as to modernism, it is suicide." *Winds of Doctrine*, p. 56.



# THE HISTORICAL TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE GOSPEL RECORDS

## SYNOPSIS

- I. The Four Gospels Our Sole Authority for the Life of Christ.
- II. Christianity Distinctly an Historical Religion.
- III. The Origin of the Synoptic Gospels.
  - The authors of these three Gospels.
  - The time when the Synoptic Gospels were composed.
  - "The Gospel before the Gospels."
  - The document known as "Q."
  - The primitive oral tradition.
  - The necessity for written records of our Lord's life.
  - The relation between the oral preaching and the earliest written documents.
  - Why the Gospels were not written immediately after Christ's Ascension.
  - The guidance of the Holy Spirit.
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- IV. Facts Which Testify to the Historical Trustworthiness of the Gospel Records.
  - They were composed in an age of superb historical composition.
  - They were intended to be historical records.
  - They were written with extreme care.
  - When they were composed many witnesses to the events they describe were still living.
  - The age in which they were written was not a time of extreme credulity.
  - The accuracy of the details of these records argue for their historical validity.
  - The absolute uniqueness of the character of Christ herein depicted.
- V. The Testimony of Two Distinguished Modern Historians to the Historical Trustworthiness of the Gospel Records.

## CHAPTER II

### THE HISTORICAL TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE GOSPEL RECORDS

As far as the supernaturalness of the Christian faith is concerned, all will admit that its supernatural elements are emphatically concentrated in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, who lived here on earth in the first part of the first century of our era. This supernaturalism of Christ to repeat what we have said before, is manifested primarily in His miraculous birth, His own miracles, His Transfiguration, and His Resurrection. If the person known as Jesus Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, if He actually performed deeds which must be characterized as miraculous, if He was transfigured on a mountain, if He rose in His own body from the grave on the third day, then, certainly, the Christian faith must be acknowledged to rest upon supernatural manifestations. If, however, these truths are denied, if Christ's entire life is found to be explainable on a purely naturalistic basis, if, while it is granted He was the noblest man that ever lived, and His influence more beneficent, uplifting, and far-reaching than that of any other person who has ever appeared on earth, it is nevertheless insisted that those aspects of His life which we have just characterized as miraculous must either be denied as historical facts, or explained away so as to make them the consequences of purely natural causes, then, whatever else the Christian faith is, it is certainly not supernaturalistic, and it does not have a supernatural Christ to proclaim. Whether these aspects of our Lord's life, certainly set forth



as miracles in the records which we have of His sojourn on earth, may be truly accepted as supernatural events, will depend upon our conception of the historical value of the documents containing the records of such manifestations. In this chapter, we want to set ourselves the task of thoroughly examining these documents, to discover, if possible, whether the records are believable, i.e., whether they are valid, whether they are historically trustworthy.

### THE GOSPELS OUR SOLE AUTHORITY FOR THE LIFE OF CHRIST

The life of our Lord on earth, as much as we know of it, is found recorded in four books, and in four books only, which appear at the very beginning of our New Testament, namely, the gospels of Matthew, of Mark, of Luke, and of John. Of course, we recognize that some events of our Lord's life are referred to and emphasized in the book of Acts, and, though not as frequently as one would expect, in the subsequent Epistles of the New Testament. The book of Acts, and the Epistles, however, give us an *interpretation* of the facts of our Lord's life, whereas the Gospels set forth the facts themselves, with scarcely any interpretation. All four Gospels, e.g., give a more or less detailed account of the Resurrection of our Lord, but they set this forth as a historic event, with scarcely any interpretation at all; the Epistles, which frequently speak of the Resurrection, give us hardly any *details* concerning the actual historical aspects of this most important event (with the single exception of the list of the post-Resurrection appearances of our Lord in I Cor. 15:5-8), but they expound with great richness the *significance* of the Resurrection for believers.

It is agreed by all that though the events occurring in the life of our Lord on earth are *referred to* in the Epistles, written to individuals and various churches in the first century of our era, and in Luke's account of the growth of

the church in the book of Acts, as well as in a few pagan writers of the century immediately following, yet, fundamentally, all we know about Christ, while He was here on earth, we know from these four Gospels. Other references add nothing important to the historical materials contained in these four books. If, then, this is our primary evidence for the life of Christ on earth, it is tremendously important for all who are interested in the truth or falsehood of the supernaturalness of Christ to give most careful consideration to the question of the value of these documents as historical records.

We confine ourselves in this discussion, primarily, to what we speak of as the Synoptic Gospels, i.e., the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. These give us, as it were, our Lord's life in the form of a *synopsis*, the three of them being constructed on closely paralleled lines, and all of them frequently incorporating records of the same speeches and events.

### CHRISTIANITY DISTINCTLY AN HISTORICAL RELIGION

The Christian faith centers in a definite person by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, who appeared at a certain time in human history, namely, in the first generation of the first century of our era, who lived in a certain place on earth, Palestine, at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. The Christian faith is an historical religion, not a record of philosophic speculation, nor a mere ethical idealism. "Some religions can be indifferent to historical fact, and many are entirely on the plane of timeless truth. Christianity cannot. It rests upon the affirmation that a series of events happened, in which God revealed Himself in action, for the salvation of men. The gospels profess to tell us what happened. They set out to nurture faith upon the testimony of such events. It remains, therefore, a question of acute interest to the Christian theologian, whether their testimony



is in fact true. No insistence upon the religious character of the Gospels, or the transcendental nature of the revelation they contain, can make that question irrelevant."<sup>1</sup>

As Professor Ernest Findlay Scott, of Union Theological Seminary, has well said: "Apart from the facts of history, there can be no sure basis of faith . . . If Christianity is to quicken and direct the lives of men, it must rest on the assurance that the story of Jesus is real. If it could be proved to be nothing more than a glorious legend, woven out of the dreams and longings of the early believers, our religion would fall to the ground. It would cease to have any relation to the world of actuality in which we live. It would be paralyzed at the very center of its power."<sup>2</sup>

#### THE ORIGIN OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

In considering the historical trustworthiness of these records, we cannot escape the problem of their origin, and in facing such a problem we are immediately confronted with one of the most difficult questions in the whole realm of New Testament criticism. In fact, says one of the most distinguished New Testament scholars of our day, who has devoted himself to the subject of New Testament criticism for the last thirty years, the problem of origins "is always an insoluble one. At the end of his search, the explorer always comes on many streams that combine to make the river; and each of them issues from springs which are hidden underground. So the course of Gospel tradition cannot be traced back beyond a certain point. We know that before anything was written, the church possessed records of Jesus, but how they originated or what was their earliest character, we shall never know."<sup>3</sup>

We have not quoted these words to escape the task that confronts us, but simply to warn our readers who here may be entering a field they have never walked in before, that we will not be able, in this chapter, to come to any dogmatic

conclusions about matters concerning which New Testament scholars so radically disagree. What we will aim at is to ascertain the generally accepted results of New Testament criticism regarding the broader issues of these involved problems.

The Synoptic Gospels carry the names of three men as their authors: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The church has almost unanimously held that the author of the first Gospel was Matthew, the publican, i.e., the tax collector who, early in our Lord's ministry, was called into the fellowship of the twelve Apostles. He is otherwise known as Levi, the son of Alphaeus (see Matt. 9:9-13; Mark 2:13-17; Luke 5:27-32). We are fully aware that some scholars insist the author of the first gospel was *not* the Matthew of the Apostolic company, but their arguments do not seriously affect the trustworthiness of the record.

The author of the second Gospel was not one of the twelve disciples, but is generally identified as the John Mark of the book of Acts, the Mark of St. Paul's Epistles, a cousin of Barnabas, and a close friend of the Apostle Paul's (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:36; Col. 4:10; II Tim. 4:11; Philemon 24; I Peter 5:13). Luke likewise was not one of the Apostolic company, and never appears in the Gospel records. Of his early life we know nothing. He and Paul met first at Troas, and journeyed together from there to Philippi (Acts 16:10-12). He probably remained with the Apostle in Rome, until Paul's death (see Acts 20:3-5; 21:15; Col. 4:14; Philemon 24). Luke was a scientist, called "the beloved physician," a skillful historian, and probably the only author of any part of the New Testament who was a Gentile. It is not necessary for our purpose, in this particular chapter, to present the evidence which has led the Christian church generally to believe that these three respective men wrote our first three Gospels. In fact, as regards Matthew and Mark, it would not make much difference, in our consideration of their historical *validity*,



if we did not know the exact names of the men who penned these pages. All the evidence which we present in this chapter will be apart from the problem of authorship itself. Regarding the Lucan authorship of the third Gospel, there is hardly any disagreement among New Testament scholars today.

#### THE TIME OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

Probably no final pronouncement will ever be made concerning the *exact* time when each of these three Gospels was written.<sup>4</sup> In fact, it cannot be said that all New Testament scholars, even conservative ones, are agreed regarding even the *order* in which these records appeared, though it is *generally* believed that Mark was written first, then Matthew, and then Luke. Radical critics have placed the writing of Mark as late as 120 A.D., though such a date is today everywhere repudiated, and need not be given serious consideration. A number of scholars, of a school of more or less extreme criticism, such as Renan, Wellhausen, Benjamin W. Bacon, etc., have placed the composition of Mark's Gospel between 70 and 80 A.D. Most critics, however, whose conclusions carry weight today, are willing to grant that this, the shortest of the four Gospels, originated between 62 and 70 A.D. Among those holding to such a date are Henry Alford, Theodore Zahn, Adolf Harnack, H. B. Sweete, Vincent Taylor, H. T. Fowler, and Ernest Findlay Scott. The late Canon Streeter, probably the greatest authority on the question of the origin of the Gospels in this century, placed Mark as early as 60 A.D., while Professor Charles C. Torrey of Yale has dared to place the date as early as 40 A.D.!

In regard to the time of the writing of Matthew's Gospel, such a conservative critic and noteworthy scholar as Theodore Zahn gives us the general period of 80 to 90 A.D.; Harnack, Wm. Sanday, A. B. Bruce, J. Weiss, place the

time of composition between 70 and 90 A.D.; whereas H. A. W. Meyer, F. Godet, W. C. Allen, B. B. Warfield, and other New Testament authorities, declare that the book must have been written approximately 68 A.D.

A few scholars have placed the writing of Luke as late as 90 A.D. but this view is held by few outstanding New Testament critics at the present time.<sup>5</sup> Harnack, Charles A. Briggs, Sanday, Alfred W. Plummer, and a number of others, agree on 80 A.D. as a more likely time for its composition; whereas, Alford, Schaff, Vincent Taylor, C. C. Torrey, and B. B. Warfield, place its composition as far back as 60 A.D. The date 60 A.D. could certainly be *possible*, as the gospel of Luke was definitely written before the Acts of the Apostles, and it would seem that the book of Acts must have been written before the death of the Apostle Paul, which occurred probably 65 A.D. From all this, we can clearly see that there is not sufficient evidence for an *absolute decision* in the matter of the date for the composition of any of these precious documents. I think, however, we would be safe in saying that the general consensus of opinion among the outstanding New Testament scholars of our generation is, that all three of the synoptic gospels were written by 80 A.D., and that none of them were composed before, say, 55 A.D. In other words, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we have many reasons to believe, were all written within half a century of our Lord's death.

### THE GOSPEL BEFORE THE GOSPELS

That there were other documents existing in the first quarter of a century of the church's history recording many of the teachings, and deeds, and the Passion of our Lord, there is no doubt. Luke's preface to his own Gospel is authority enough for this. "Since many have undertaken to draw up a detailed narrative concerning the facts fully established among us, just as those pass them on to us, who



were eye witnesses from the start, and who became ministers of the Word, it has seemed good to me also having made an accurate examination of them all from the start, to write you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus, that you may fully know the certainty of the matters concerning which you were instructed."<sup>6</sup>

"No one knows how many of these attempts to record something of our Lord's wonderful life were made, but this preface gives a lively picture of the intense, universal interest felt by the early church in the story of the Lord Jesus: Apostles constantly telling what they had seen and heard; many of their hearers taking notes of what they said for the benefit of themselves and others: through these gospelettes acquaintance with the evangelic history circulating among believers, creating a thirst for more and yet more; imposing on such a man as Luke, the task of preparing a gospel as *full, correct, and well-arranged* as possible through the use of all available means, previous writings or oral testimony of surviving eye witnesses."<sup>7</sup> It is commonly acknowledged that Luke had before him the gospel of Mark; some believe he also had the gospel of Matthew, but of this we cannot be certain.

#### THE DOCUMENT KNOWN AS "Q"

Most New Testament scholars insist that behind the synoptic records there is a common document which, it is suggested, should be called "Q," the initial of the German word "Quelle," meaning *source*. There have been actually thousands of pages written on this problem of an original "Q" document, but I believe the simplest and clearest presentation of it all is the one by Canon E. Basil Redlich, in his very excellent *Student's Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*, from which (because we are not experts at all in this matter) we take the liberty of making the following extended quotation:

“When the subject-matter of Matthew,” writes Canon Redlich, “is compared with that of Mark, we find that Matthew reproduces the substance of 606 verses of Mark. This means that only 55 verses of Mark are omitted by Matthew. All these 606 verses, however, are not included in their entirety; some are revised, and others are shortened or compressed in Matthew, with the result that the 606 verses of Mark amount to about 500 verses in Matthew. But though nearly all Mark is thus found in less than half of Matthew, about 51 per cent of Mark’s actual words, that is more than half his words, is reproduced in Matthew.

“When Luke and Mark are similarly compared, it is found that about 320 verses of Mark, that is about half of Mark, are utilised by Luke in about as many verses. But the proportion of the actual words of Mark in Luke is 53 per cent, which is a larger percentage than in Matthew. Further, of the 55 verses of Mark omitted by Matthew, 24 are found in Luke. Thus only 31 verses of Mark are not to be found in either Matthew or Luke.

"This synoptic relationship may be stated in the form of equations:

Matthew's 1068 verses = about 500 from Mark  
+ over 550 from other sources.  
Luke's 1149 verses = about 320 from Mark  
+ over 830 from other sources.

“These equations can be advanced a stage further, for when the 550 odd verses from other sources of Matthew are compared with the 830 odd verses from other sources of Luke, about 250 verses, consisting chiefly of sayings and discourses of Christ, show such close parallelism and similarity that it is almost universally agreed that behind Matthew and Luke there is a second common source, and that this source is not oral tradition but a written Greek document. This document is not known to exist; for many years it was held to be a hypothetical document; the assumption of its existence was made in order to satisfy the problem of the close parallelism of part of the non-Marcian matter in Matthew and Luke. This document was designated “Q,” and was, in all probability, written in Antioch in Syria.”<sup>8</sup>



As to the time when "Q" was composed, probably Canon Redlich's statement is as valuable a summary of current belief in this matter as any. "'Q' was a guide to Christian life and conduct, specially written to meet the needs of the Antiochene church at the time of crisis. It was a Gospel Manual for a Gentile Church. Quite clearly it did not contain all the teaching of Jesus, but only as much as was necessary to meet the special problems and circumstances of a special Church at a special stage in its history. It could only have been written before the Apostolic Council (A.D. 50). A date before the first Mission of Barnabas and Saul, i.e. nearer A.D. 47 is probable."<sup>9</sup>

Professor Streeter goes so far as to say that "Q" "was probably written twenty years before Mark," and, as Professor Robertson comments, "if 'Q' is twenty years earlier than Mark, it is entirely possible that Ramsay and Salmon are correct in thinking that 'Q' was written during the lifetime of Jesus and for this reason does not include the Passion Week."<sup>10</sup>

### THE CONTENTS OF "Q"

What the exact contents of "Q" were, we probably will never know, as no one has ever seen such a document, nor did any of the ancient fathers tell us that they had seen it. Even such an extreme critic as Professor Kirsopp Lake frankly admits that there is no way of our considering the "Q" document with any degree of accuracy, going so far as to say, "that 'Q' cannot certainly be reconstructed is as clear as that it once existed. . . . It would seem probable that it was a collection of stories illustrating the teaching which Jesus had given to the multitude in Galilee. The method of its use in Matthew and Luke is equally obscure. Two extreme positions are possible. Either Matthew preserved 'Q' as faithfully as he did Mark, while Luke cut it up into shorter pieces and connected each piece with a

narrative-setting which he either invented or found elsewhere; or Luke preserved 'Q' as faithfully as he did Mark, giving the narrative-setting as he found it, and Matthew usually left out the narrative-setting and collected the sayings so that they formed long discourses. As between these two positions, the second is, perhaps, the more probable, though there is no real evidence and there can be no final conclusion."<sup>11</sup>

After a careful examination of the material which is supposed to have been included in "Q," Professor A. T. Robertson concludes, "It is now clear that one has in 'Q' the same essential picture of Jesus, as the Christ that we find in the other Gospels, and in Paul's Epistles. The facts in 'Q' are open and simple and beyond reasonable dispute. . . . The search for the historical Jesus, laudable as it is, has not gotten rid of the theological Christ. In 'Q' Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, the Son of Man. One may explain it as one will, but the fact remains. Harnack admits that in 'Q' there is no evidence that there was a time when Jesus did not regard Himself as the Messiah. We come back, therefore, in our earliest document about Jesus to the same high estimate of our Lord that we find in the latest portrait. The lines are simpler and the shading is lighter, but the essential features of the God-Man are in 'Q.' . . . Those who have found Jesus to be the Lord and Saviour will rejoice that in 'Q' He is Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever. . . . It is manifest that the impression made by Jesus during His ministry was all that the Gospels represented it to be. The heart of it all is in 'Q.' "<sup>12</sup>

Other sources for our Gospels have been suggested, but it is not necessary to enter into this discussion further than we have. The only reason we have taken so much space with a consideration of the "Q" document is because it forms a prominent part of every work dealing with the origin of the Gospels. That there were lives of Christ before Matthew, Mark, and Luke wrote, we all agree; that it was such a



document as "Q," let the critics decide. One thing is certain, as the result of all this discussion, New Testament scholars are agreed that the basis of our three Gospels was a document written as early as within *twenty years* of our Lord's death.

### THE PRIMITIVE ORAL TRADITION

Our Lord died toward the end of the third decade of the first century of our era, somewhere between 27 and 30 A.D., no one knows exactly when. Between His death and the writing of the first Gospel, a quarter of a century intervened. But we cannot believe that the church knew nothing definite about our Lord's life and teachings until these Gospels were in circulation, or before "Q" was written. Emphatically otherwise. All the evidence, common sense itself, every law of reason, persuade us that the church must have known a great deal about the Lord Jesus before any of the records of His life which we have were compiled, or, for that matter, before any records at all were compiled. Even before Christ died, men went about preaching the Gospel, sent on this holy mission by the Lord Jesus Himself (Matthew 10:5-7, 27; Mark 3:14; 16:15, 20; Luke 9:2; 4:47). As soon as our Lord ascended to heaven, and the Holy Spirit fell upon the church at Pentecost, men went everywhere preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus (Acts 4:2; 5:42; 8:4, 5; 12:25, 35, 40; 9:20; 10:36, 37; 11:20; 13:5, 38; 14:15, 21; 16:10; 17:3, 13, 18; 19:13; 20:25; 28:31). In fact, the book of Acts is hardly anything else but a narrative of some of the great preaching missions in the first generation of the Christian church, and every page gives us overwhelming evidence that the subject for preaching in the Christian church, immediately after the Lord's ascension, was nothing else than the Lord Jesus Christ, and all that directly pertained to Him.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, it is common knowledge that the Christians

gathered every Lord's day, or at least with regular frequency, whenever possible, for divine worship, for hearing the good news, for the strengthening of faith, for being instructed concerning the precious words and the wondrous deeds of Christ Jesus whom they worshiped. "In the Christian assembly, as in the synagogue, a passage was read from scripture, and there is reason to believe that this reading was followed by some utterance of Jesus, or by some episode of His life which served to illuminate or supplement the scriptural passage."<sup>14</sup>

### THE NECESSITY FOR WRITTEN RECORDS OF OUR LORD'S LIFE

If the church was from the beginning in possession of a great mass of information regarding the teaching and work of the Lord Jesus, which was constantly used in the earliest preaching, why did not the church continue to confine itself to this oral proclamation of the truth regarding Christ, and refrain from the severe undertaking of setting down these themes in documents which would be used throughout the world? The very stating of the question will, no doubt, bring answers to the minds of many of our readers. I think probably no one has given us a better summary of the reasons why the church was actually *compelled*, sooner or later, to put its message in writing, than Dr. Frederick C. Grant, Dean of the Western Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, since 1927, and Editor-in-Chief of the *Anglican Theological Review* since 1924. We take the liberty of quoting the following extended passage from his interesting and informative discussion of this problem.

"First of these reasons was, no doubt, the motive of missionary propaganda. Out in the broad Mediterranean, outside Palestine, the use of the written word was being increasingly recognized, in our period, as a medium for the dissemination of religious teaching. . . . Another motive for writing was the edification of new



converts—"that thou mightest know the certainty of the things wherein thou hast been instructed" (Luke 1:4) was an early motive and a strong one. Since the Gospel meant more than simply repentance, it was necessary that the teaching of Christ should be set forth in explicit terms. . . . Still another motive was one which sprang into prominence as a result of the controversy with Jews and heretics. The simplest answer to the calumny of the Jews regarding Jesus' birth and Resurrection was to state the facts as they had actually occurred, in accordance with the tradition handed down within the church.

"In form, the Gospels are the natural result of the effort to set forth 'what Jesus both did and taught,' in the light of the church's need for such records in her teaching, worship, discipline, missionary propaganda, controversy, political and philosophical apologetics. Why gospels resulted from these processes, rather than diatribe, exhortations, epistles, apocalypses, codes, liturgies, mystic meditations, or other forms of religious literature; or, rather, why gospels resulted in addition to these other forms (all of which are represented in the New Testament and other early Christian literature) is wholly bound up with the purposes and motives that went into their production. It must ever be a cause for devout thankfulness on the part both of the Christian believer and of the scientific historian that these motives were operative—and effective—in the production of the evangelic literature of the New Testament." <sup>15</sup>

#### THE RELATION OF THE ORAL PREACHING TO THE WRITTEN DOCUMENTS

We have the synoptic gospels in front of us, one of which may have been written as early as 50 A.D. We have already noted that our Lord had been put to death twenty years before this. We have seen that during these twenty years, the church was incessantly active in preaching the gospel which related to the life and work and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. The question now arises, do our gospels, particularly the synoptic gospels, rest solidly upon the

earlier oral tradition, or are they distinct from this oral testimony. In other words, was the oral tradition one thing, and the records in the gospels something else, or is there a direct vital relationship between the two, making one to be the ultimate result of the other? In this matter, as in so many others which we are forced to face in this chapter, our own opinion is of no particular weight, and that is the reason why we continually call to testify outstanding scholars of our generation who have devoted their entire life to the study of these complicated but tremendously important New Testament problems. Such an authority as Professor Ernest Findlay Scott, from whom we have previously quoted, emphatically gives it as his opinion that "the documents are nothing essentially but the tradition put into writing. No doubt, the act of writing entailed more conciseness of language, and a more studied arrangement; but in its substance, the record was the same and" (here Dr. Scott makes a point we should carefully consider) "was necessary if the new gospels were to win acceptance. The Christian public had to feel assured that nothing had been changed in the teaching through the different method of presentation. . . . *The record was not something added to the message but was, itself, the message in its original form.*"<sup>16</sup>

Dr. B. B. Warfield, one of the greatest New Testament scholars of this century, came to the same conclusion some years before, and declared that, "only a short generation, something like five and thirty years, intervened between the death of Jesus and the composition of the synoptic gospels. It is impossible to suppose that the conception of Jesus had radically altered in this brief interval. . . . Grant that our gospels belong to the second generation of documents; and that behind them lie still earlier documents upon which they depend. These earlier documents cannot be presumed to have presented a portrait of Jesus radically different from that which all three of their representatives have derived from them."<sup>17</sup>



WHY THE GOSPELS WERE NOT WRITTEN IMMEDIATELY  
AFTER CHRIST'S ASCENSION

Having discovered, from Professor Grant's careful analysis, some of the circumstances which demanded the writing of the gospel records, some will probably ask, why were not the gospels written at once, instead of twenty-five to forty years after our Lord's death? No more dependable, scholarly writer on the origin and characteristics of the gospels in the nineteenth century could be found, at least in the English world, than Brooke Foss Westcott, and his words regarding this particular aspect of our problem, though written now eighty years ago, are still of value, and can be found repeated and emphasized anew in the most recent books relating to New Testament problems.

"It was most unlikely that men who had been accustomed to a system of training generally, if not exclusively oral, should have formed any design to commit to writing a complete account of the history or the doctrines of the gospel. The whole influence of Palestinian habits was most adverse to such an undertaking. The rules of scriptural interpretation, the varied extensions of the Law and the sayings of the elders, were preserved either by oral tradition or perhaps, in some degree, in secret rolls, till the final dispersion of the Jewish nation led to the compilation of the Mishna. The Old Testament was held to be the single and sufficient source of truth and wisdom, the reflection of divine knowledge and the embodiment of human feeling. The voice of the teacher might influence or apply its precepts but it admitted no definite additions. The scriptures contained infinite subjects for meditation in their secret depths; and the practise of Judaism furnished an orthodox commentary upon their general purport, open alike to all, clearly intelligible and absolutely authoritative."<sup>18</sup>

## THE GUIDANCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

We have been careful to give the *natural* reasons for the composition of our gospels, as set forth by the outstanding

New Testament scholars of our day, but we cannot close a discussion of this particular part of our subject without asking whether there is not another reason why the gospels were written when they were, and as they were, namely the guidance of the Holy Spirit. What we are now about to say does not have any direct relationship to the problem of authorship, and I suppose that there are many who will be reading this book who do not believe in such a fact as the supernatural guidance of the Holy Spirit in the composition of these records. We are not speaking here of the ultimate relationship of inspiration to the problem of historical trustworthiness, but, if we believe that the church is a divine institution, founded by the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and was promised by its Lord before He ascended into glory the presence, the power, the guidance, the teaching of the Holy Spirit, may we not surely believe that He, the Spirit of God, knew from the beginning of the church what the history of that church would be, down to the end of this age, and the needs of the church throughout its centuries of ever-changing history? The Spirit of God knew, surely, how important it was that the church should be kept safe from error, from heresy, from compromise with pagan religions, from vague mystical conceptions of Christ, which would change the foundations of faith from solid historic fact into the ever-shifting sands of the speculations of men, and He knew also that the church could be kept from these ever-present dangers only by having in its possession authentic, dependable, historical records of the life, the character, and the work of the Head of the Church, the Lord Jesus Christ. If the Spirit of God indwells believers, if men preach in the power of the Spirit (when they truly preach), if many of the great historic events of the church of Christ were achieved by the definite leading of the Holy Spirit, may it not then also be true, that the Holy Spirit moved in the hearts of certain men in the early church to compose these



very documents which the Spirit of God knew would be necessary for the maintenance of the Christian faith? The pre-eminent position accorded the Gospels throughout the church, and the constant necessity in every age for a return to the Gospels, for a proper appreciation of the Person of our Lord, would seem to demand an affirmative answer to such a question as this.

### THE PROBLEM OF FORM CRITICISM

During the last decade, a subject has arisen in New Testament criticism which is now so occupying the attention of New Testament scholars that we cannot, even in this brief discussion of the origin of our Gospels, avoid at least a presentation of the subject. We are referring to what is technically known as "form criticism." By "form criticism" is meant that hypothesis which declares that practically all of the synoptic gospels can be divided into sections, which allow for classification in certain definite groups, the separate numbers of each group revealing an adherence to a definite *form*, or model. One of the outstanding authorities on this subject, after emphasizing that all the synoptic material may be roughly classified as either *narratives*, or *sayings*, goes on to remark that, "from the standpoint of form, the main characteristic of the stories is that they quickly reach their climax, in a saying of Jesus which was of interest to the first Christians because it bore directly upon questions of faith and practise. . . . Usually a question is put to Jesus by enemies or friends, or a query is prompted by an act of healing, or an incident. To the question Jesus replies, sometimes by means of a counter-question, or at other times by a pointed ethical or religious precept, and with His word, the story ends, although a statement may be added which indicates the effect produced on the hearers of the crowd. (Two examples which are given are Mark 2:16-22 and Luke 12:13-59.) . . .

In the longer stories, and especially in those which record miracles, there are three well-marked stages. First, the sufferer is introduced with some description of his malady, and, perhaps, a reference to attempts which have failed to cure him. Then the cure is described, with greater or less detail as the case may be, and occasionally with some account of the means employed. Finally, though this stage is not always present, the results confirming the cure are depicted; the demoniac is seen clothed and in his right mind; the paralytic takes up his bed and walks; food is ordered for the restored daughter. . . . The third group contains the sayings of Jesus. . . . Bultmann distinguishes (among the sayings) five sub-classes: (1) Logia or wisdom words, (2) Prophetic Apocalyptic words, (3) Law-words and community rules, (4) 'I' words (i.e. sayings in the first person singular), and (5) parables."<sup>19</sup>

Whatever be the ultimate value of such classifications I myself am not sure, and it seems that many men who have spent years in the study of New Testament problems are not yet willing to acknowledge that form criticism has any great contribution to make to the problem of gospel origins. To begin with, it must be acknowledged that, "in all classifications a large artificial element is inevitable, for the originators of the synoptic tradition were unconscious of literary types, and our nomenclature represents distinctions which we superimpose on the ancient material."<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, and this is very important, we must always remember in thinking our way through such theories as this, that communities which are said to have given rise to these various sections of the gospel records must have been made up of very ordinary people, who, as a community, common sense would tell us, could not produce such pieces of literature. "A community, as such, never produces anything. Whatever it decides or does, some one man is ultimately responsible, although the consent of the



many gives the necessary weight to his action. A group is never creative left to itself, it only stands still; and in all ages this has been the fatal drawback to any type of system that is strictly communal. Least of all in matters of the spirit, is anything produced by the group. We speak of an ancient song or ballad as made by the people; but this is only our way of saying that we cannot name the author. There was not a village crowd which broke out into the song spontaneously; someone made it just as surely as Milton made 'Paradise Lost.' " <sup>21</sup>

Finally, as Professor Scott well asks, if we say "that the gospels were produced by the community, what was the community? It consisted of men and women who acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah and from this, it is certain that Jesus had existed and had acted in such a manner as to awaken faith and devotion. . . . There can be no question that the church proclaimed a message which was carried to all nations, and it is contended that this message gave birth to a tradition. But how had the message itself originated? It cannot have developed out of Judaism, for at all essential points it broke away from the religion of the law. . . . How could a message so abhorrent to all Jewish sentiment have emerged from Judaism? It can only have done so because something had happened which had revolutionized the old conceptions. . . . The only cause which can be deemed at all adequate is of the kind known to us through the gospel history." <sup>22</sup> Whatever be the ultimate conclusions regarding the value of dividing the Gospel narratives according to these various more or less artificially conceived forms, the facts which are contained in these structures still abide in all their original integrity. The teachings are still Christ's teachings. The miracles are still miracles. The Resurrection is still the Resurrection. The supernatural elements of the Gospels are not in any way invalidated or legitimately eliminated by any reasonable scheme of literary analysis.

OUR GOSPELS WERE COMPOSED IN AN AGE  
OF SUPERB HISTORICAL COMPOSITION

We are now ready, after this long preliminary discussion, to come face to face with the question, Are our Gospels, as we have them, historically trustworthy? In a thorough consideration of the supernaturalness of Christ, no question is quite as important as this one. If the Gospels are historically accurate, then all we need do is to ascertain what the Gospels say, to determine whether or not the Christ there portrayed is indeed a supernatural person. To begin with, it should be remembered that the Gospels were written in a period when some of the greatest of all ancient writings were composed, especially historical writings. Among the Roman historians we note Velleius Paterculus, who lived from 19 B.C. to A.D. 31; Valerius Maximus, who flourished about 25 A.D.; and, above all, Tacitus, author of the famous and indispensable *Annals*, who lived approximately 55 to 117 A.D. Among the Greeks, we have the famous geographer, Strabo of Amasia (40 B.C. to 25 A.D.); the philosophers Philo of Alexandria (30 B.C. to 45 A.D.), and Seneca (4 B.C. to 65 A.D.); the greatest of Roman biographers, Plutarch (50 to 120 A.D.); and the greatest Jewish historian of all ages, Flavius Josephus (37-100 A.D.). "It cannot be deemed impossible then, in the first century, when literary men from the Emperor Claudius downward, were writing history, that there were also historians in the Christian church. . . . Jewish authors were peculiarly active in the field of history in the first century. Josephus was engaged on his great works in the very years when the Gospels of Matthew and Luke appeared to have been written. . . . We may fairly speak of a school of Jewish historians which flourished in the period 50 to 100 A.D. If our Gospels had not been Christian writings, they would have taken their place as admirable examples of Jewish historical literature, and



there is no just reason for denying their historical character because they deal with the acts of Jesus and not with those of Herod, or Ananias the high priest." <sup>23</sup>

### THE GOSPELS WERE INTENDED TO BE HISTORICAL RECORDS

We often hear it said that we must not take the Gospels too seriously, and that we must not ask from them more than their authors originally intended to give, it being hinted in such statements that these Gospel records were not originally produced to provide the church with an historical account of our Lord's life on earth. Such a theory as this is directly contrary to the true situation which called forth the writing of such narratives. As one of our leading New Testament scholars has well said, "*The chief interest of the Gospels is historical. They are meant to inspire faith in Jesus and to teach his rule of life; but as the necessary foundation of all else, they explain who He was and what He had done and suffered.*" <sup>24</sup> If the Gospels are not histories, then what can they possibly be called? We do not say that the Epistles of Paul are histories, but letters, though they do contain historic facts; we do not say that the book of Revelation is a history, but a prophecy; but when we come to the Gospels, and the book of Acts, certainly we must call these biographical histories, or historical biographies, either way one wishes to phrase it. One thing is sure, the authors of these documents intended them to be records of Christ's life and work on earth, which the church could depend upon as being trustworthy and accurate. The preface to Luke's Gospel certainly implies that he undertook to write a *history*, and Luke's Gospel does not so differ from the Gospels of Matthew and Mark but that we can say that these writers also had the same purpose in mind. This leads us directly to our next point.

## THE GOSPELS WERE WRITTEN WITH EXTREME CARE

If anyone will turn to what is known as a Harmony of the Gospels (for instance, such a valuable one as that by Stevens and Burton <sup>25</sup>), they will discover that in scores of places the three Gospels are identical, if not in exact phraseology, at least in the fundamental facts set forth, and in the manner in which they are set forth. This being true, then we have a right to say that if it is acknowledged that one of the gospels has been written with great care, with historical accuracy, the other Gospels have also been written with more or less the same care. Now it is just here that we would quote from one who is probably the leading authority in historiography in America today, for the last twenty years Professor of History at Columbia University, author of the article "History" in the eleventh and fourteenth editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Dr. James T. Shotwell. Before listening to Professor Shotwell's testimony we should remember that he is a rationalist, and most emphatically not an evangelical Christian, in any sense of the word. In his new book, *The History of History*, the most important work on this subject ever to be published in our language, Professor Shotwell makes this remarkable confession: "Luke, as the *Acts of the Apostles* shows, was an educated man who compiled his history out of various sources, was accurate in geography and painstaking, and *his work stands easily alongside the best pagan histories of his time.*" <sup>26</sup>

Whatever else we may decide about the trustworthiness of the Gospel records, such a statement as this absolutely annihilates any assertion on the part of some secondary authority that the Gospels were not written with care. An authority of the first class like Professor Shotwell, on a topic like this, is worth more than ten thousand statements from second- and third-rate historians who are determined to speak with prejudice against the Gospel records.



THE GOSPELS COMPOSED AT A TIME WHEN MANY  
WITNESSES TO ITS EVENTS WERE STILL LIVING

It is sometimes said that the Gospels were written by enthusiastic followers of Christ to support their own *self-created* ideas concerning His deity, His power to perform miracles, the impression which He made upon His contemporaries, and that from these stories the church ultimately derived its conception of Christ. The truth is the very opposite of this. The Church, a body of disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, existed years before the Gospels were written, and instead of the Gospels determining what the early church would believe, the early church proved a restraining influence on the writers of the Gospel, keeping them from inserting in their documents anything which the church knew had not really taken place, determining what they should insert in their writings. Surely the church of the first generation after our Lord's Resurrection well knew what He had done and what He had said. "Christ's disciples, probably all of them, were about His own age, and would be under forty when He died. At least some of them would survive through the greater part of the first generation. They were for some time the leading teachers of the church, and while they lived were the outstanding figures in that Palestinian community in which the record took shape. . . . All the narrators would be conscious that their statements might be challenged by those who were in a position to know. Again, the record was transmitted in Palestine under conditions which were much the same in Jesus' lifetime. Ideas and customs, methods of government, party divisions, had undergone no change. A frame-work was thus given to which the history had to conform, and to this extent a limit was placed on free invention. Everyone could see at once when an act was ascribed to Jesus which He could not, under the known conditions, have performed." <sup>27</sup>

THE GOSPELS WERE NOT WRITTEN AT A TIME  
OF EXTREME CREDULITY

The suggestion has often been made that the Gospels were written at a time in human history when extreme credulity was an outstanding characteristic of most of the citizens, and that because of this the people of our Lord's day believed that many things which He did were miraculous, or were manifestations of the supernatural, because they were in the habit of looking for supernatural events, or explaining some amazing experience as a direct act of God. This is the entire argument of Professor Shirley Jackson Case's book, *Experience with the Supernatural in Early Christian Times*, which he published in 1929. Well, for one thing, the Gospels themselves do not reveal to us a people in Palestine who could be accused of unusual credulity; rather, the very opposite. For instance, the Apostle Thomas emphatically refused to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead, until he should be allowed to put his fingers in the holes in Jesus' hands and side, made by the nails and the spear. Furthermore, we are told that when the women came from the empty tomb and reported that Christ had arisen, the disciples counted this report as "idle tales" (Luke 24:11). One cannot say that the Pharisees of Jesus' time were easily convinced of the reality of Christ's miracles; the truth is, many of them were eye-witnesses of His miracles for years, and absolutely refused to believe that He was doing anything by the power of God. This is what made our Lord cry out, "If I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?" (John 8:46). If it had been an age of extreme credulity, the Lord Jesus would never have hung upon a cross, for all would have believed Him to be the Son of God.

I think the words, though written sometime ago, by the late Professor George P. Fisher, ought to be well considered when we are discussing such a point as this. "We have only



to remember how Aristotle's writings had been, for more than three centuries, familiar to educated men; how Thucydides, a century earlier, had illustrated the historical spirit; how Epicureanism, with its bare recognition of the existence of gods, united with contempt for the doctrine of a special Providence, was the prevailing philosophy; how Roman Law was administered throughout the civilized world; how the philosophical treatises of Cicero exhibit the utter infidelity, as to the mythical religion, of the statesmen of the time; how a man Julius Caesar could avow in the Roman senate, without protest and contradiction, his disbelief in the existence of the soul after death; how antagonists of Christianity like Lucian and Celsus treated its claim as to miracles, we have only to remember such facts as these, in order to be assured that the intellectual state of the ancient world was one far removed from childish credulity." <sup>28</sup>

#### THE DETAILS OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES ARGUE FOR THE ACCURACY OF THE RECORDS

The Gospels, and the details which they give us, do not bear out the theory so often heard, that they were written to reveal a person who at once obtained the allegiance of all who heard him, a person whom the world received at once, as the long-looked-for Messiah, and King of kings. Indeed, "careful study of the Gospels discloses the fact that their authors, far from recording only those events and circumstances which tended to commend the cause which they had at heart, did, as often as not, record events and circumstances which tended all the other way, and could only serve to cast discredit on their cause. . . . One would like to know, for instance, why, after St. John the Baptist had borne such glowing and emphatic testimony to our Lord's Person, both St. Matthew and St. Luke should have inserted the story of how at a later date he had sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question: 'Art Thou He that

cometh, or look we for another?' (Matt. 11:3). Considering the very high estimation in which John had been held by the Jews, was not that just the sort of incident which, if it really occurred, had far better have been left unmentioned? That the great Baptist should have expressed the least doubt as to the accuracy of his previous statements was not likely to help forward the spread of the new religion.

"Neither was it to the furtherance of the new religion that the Apostles, the acknowledged leaders of the church, should so frequently be represented in the Gospels in an unfavourable light. We are told that again and again they misunderstood their Master's meaning, acted foolishly, were not altogether faithful to Him, and sometimes had to be severely rebuked. But why set down these things in this naked fashion? Would it not have been better to let such things remain unsaid?

"Again, when the two brothers, James and John, wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume the Samaritan village which had refused to receive Him, 'He turned and rebuked them and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of' (Luke 9:55). But He did more sometimes than rebuke His disciples. He was 'moved with indignation' against them, as when, for instance, they sought to drive away the mothers who had brought their little ones to Him to be blessed; and once, when they had been engaged in an unseemly quarrel among themselves as to which of them should be the greatest, 'He took a little child, and set him in the midst of them: and taking him in His arms He said unto them, Whosoever shall receive one of such little children in My name receiveth Me. . . . Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven' (Luke 18:15-17). In the fourth Gospel, too, we are told how on the very night before He was crucified the same sort of discreditable dispute broke out (Mark 9:33-37).

"There is another point, one to which I have already



briefly referred. The Evangelists were, of course, obliged to put on record the undeniable fact that our Lord had been crucified. They could not very well have done otherwise. But were they obliged to put also on record all those gross indignities to which He was subjected during the last few hours of His life? We should have thought that they would have passed them over in silence. But they deliberately go into details; they do not shrink from telling their readers how He had been flogged with the terrible Roman scourge, how in mockery of His claims a crown of thorns had been placed on His head, a foolish reed-sceptre thrust into His hands, and how He had been blindfolded, jeered at and even spat upon by the rough Roman soldiery, only too glad to take it out of a Jew, one of that detested race, whenever the lucky opportunity arose." <sup>29</sup>

Monseigneur Pierre Batiffol, in his excellent book, *The Credibility of the Gospel*, brings out another point in discussing the historical accuracy of the Gospel records, when he speaks of "the allusions to contemporary events. Persons are named without introduction, such as Pharisees, scribes, or priests; so also all references to Jewish institutions or customs are left unexplained. Pharisees come to Jesus, and tell him: 'Go, depart from hence, for Herod seeketh to kill Thee.' And Jesus answers them 'Go and tell that fox: Behold, I drive out devils and I cure the sick today and tomorrow, and the third day I shall be ended . . .' (Luke 13:31, 32). So curt a statement is only possible in the time of Herod. They spoke to Jesus 'of the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices,' and 'of the eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloe fell and killed them,' two events otherwise unknown, but which are in the minds of all at the moment when they referred to them." <sup>30</sup> All the details regarding Jerusalem could have been so accurately noted only by those who knew the city intimately before its destruction in 70 A.D.

THE ABSOLUTE UNIQUENESS OF THE CHARACTER OF  
CHRIST PORTRAYED IN THE GOSPELS

What we are now about to say may not be thought by some to have direct reference to the question of the historical trustworthiness of the Gospels, yet indirectly it certainly does carry evidence persuading us to believe in the accuracy of their descriptions. It is acknowledged on every hand that the person portrayed in these four Gospels is, without any contradiction, the most remarkable character who has ever appeared in human history. What we know of that character is from these four Gospels. Either these evangelists have given us a correct description of the character, the life, the teaching, and work, of Jesus of Nazareth, or they have given us a literary product portraying an imaginary character, the result of their own attempt, as it were, to manufacture a character who would be worthy of the worship of men. That the latter situation could have ever given us these Gospel records is absolutely inconceivable. Even such a pronounced unbeliever and rationalist as Rousseau asked, two hundred years ago, "Shall we say that the Gospel story is a work of the imagination?", answering it in his own words as follows, "Friend, that is not how one invents; the facts about Socrates which no one doubts, are not so well attested as those about Jesus Christ. At best you are only putting the difficulty away from you, without getting rid of it. It would be more incredible that four men should have agreed to manufacture this book than that there was a single man who supplied the subject matter for it. No Jews could have hit upon its tone or morality; the Gospel has notes of reality which are so great, so striking, so absolutely inimitable, that their inventor would be a more astonishing person than their Hero."<sup>31</sup>

Professor Andrew Martin Fairburn has, buried away in his fascinating, inexhaustible *Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, which today almost none read, to their own im-



poverishment, such a convincing and profound presentation of this entire subject of the portrait of Christ painted by the four evangelists, that we believe our readers will be grateful if we place almost the entire passage before them for their own study and edification.

"Jesus is conceived and represented, under whatever terms His Person may be described, as a conscious and continuous Unity. The portrait of Him is consistent, the work of writers who feel themselves to be dealing with a real and rational being, whose words could be reported and whose actions could be narrated in language men could understand. They do not write as men who romance, or who know that they are relating marvels other men will find it hard to believe: on the contrary they write soberly, with the unperplexed consciousness of men who describe matters of fact which, though wonderful, are yet entirely credible, because in keeping with the person and attributes of Him whose acts they are said to be. There is nothing so difficult as to unite in a single person attributes which experience has never seen so associated, and which thought persists in conceiving as opposites; but what would be not so much difficult as impossible would be for a writer to betray no consciousness of invention, no feeling of the abnormal; and to maintain, alike as regards nature, character, and action, the integrity and concrete unity of his hero as a rational and historical being. Yet these are the features which distinguish our canonical Gospels. The Evangelists, however simple, uncritical, and credulous we may conceive them to have been, yet knew the distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary, the normal and the miraculous; and understood how little compatible miracles were with the persons of the men they met in daily life. Experience, therefore, could not supply them with any type to which they could conform the person they meant to portray. Two alternatives are thus alone possible: either the portrait was ideal, a product of the creative imagination, or real, a study from life, a picture which embodied personal experience and observation. . . .

"It appears, then, as if the legitimate inference from the histories themselves were that we have in Jesus a study from life—the portrait of one who actually lived and as He lived. And it is this which gives peculiar value to the fact that the authors of the

Gospels use to describe their subject two distinct classes of terms, expressing ideas that must have been as opposite to them as they are to us, which we differentiate, though they did not, as 'natural' and 'supernatural.' He appears in all four Gospels as the son of Mary, as known to the inhabitants of Nazareth, where he had been brought up, though all they tell us is that He was a citizen of that mean city, and a member of one of its humblest families. He is described as growing in stature, in wisdom, and in favour with God and man. The one glimpse we have into His boyhood shows Him as a child His parents could lose and seek sorrowing; and in His manhood and public ministry He is seen to share our common human weaknesses. He is represented as weary, as hungry, as thirsty, as angry, as suffering, as in need of sympathy, as seeking God in prayer, as shrinking from death, as dying, and as dead. The attributes and the fate of universal man are His as they are ours. But He also appears, as we have just seen, clothed in quite other attributes and doing quite extraordinary things. He is to all four Evangelists the Son of God, the Messiah, Lord of the sabbath, and Saviour of men, with power on earth to forgive sins, to establish the kingdom of God, to found a new covenant in His blood, and to judge the people, acquitting or condemning them as they have or have not confessed Him. And He behaves as one to whom such acts and attributes can be ascribed. He calls disciples, and forms them into an eternal and universal society. He works miracles, heals the diseased, casts out devils, feeds the hungry, even raises the dead. He has miracles worked upon Him, is transfigured and appears in a visible glory which proclaims Him the Son of God, and, after suffering the death of the Cross and being laid in the grave, He is raised up and appears unto many.

"Now the remarkable thing is not simply that these attributes and acts are represented as His, but that they are conceived as quite natural to Him, as not making Him anomalous or abnormal, but as leaving Him simple and rational and real,—a person who never ceases to be Himself, who has no double consciousness and plays no double part, but expresses Himself in history according to the nature He has and the truth within Him. There is nothing quite like this in literature, no miraculous person who is so truly natural, so continuously one and the same; and no writers of the miraculous who so feel that they are dealing with what is normal



and regular through and through. These are things which have more than a psychological interest; they speak of men who have stood face to face with the reality, and are conscious of only describing what they saw." <sup>32</sup>

THE TESTIMONY OF TWO DISTINGUISHED HISTORIANS  
REGARDING THE HISTORICAL TRUSTWORTHINESS  
OF THE GOSPEL RECORDS

As we draw this discussion to a close, perhaps we can do no better than to quote the final verdicts of two of the greatest historical scholars of the nineteenth century, on the historical value of these precious documents which we are studying, and in which the supernatural elements of Christ's life are found imbedded. The first witness we would call is Adolf Deissmann, until his recent death the distinguished Professor of Theology in the University of Berlin, one of the greatest Greek scholars of the last half century, whose knowledge of the historical and archeological material in the New Testament was probably as thorough and profound as that of any man in the Christian church of our generation. Toward the close of a long life (in 1929) Professor Deissmann wrote:

"It is now more than twenty years since, one afternoon in spring, as the sun was sinking, I rode on the Ionian coast coming from Miletus toward an ancient Anatolian sanctuary, the ruins of the temple of Apollo at Didyma. On the right was the Aegean Sea with the bare rocks of the distant islands of Samos, Patmos, and Cos. In front Didyma was gradually appearing, a heap of marble and ruins out of which arose the three massive columns of the ancient temple glistening in the evening sun. Long ago a desired object of the archaeological treasure digger, this temple of Apollo at Didyma, destroyed by earthquakes and the storms of centuries, had to suffer blasting with dynamite, at the hands of men.

"But the foundations of the temple withstood the dynamite. They withstood it because they lay huge and massive, deep in the

earth. The earthquakes had been able to destroy the columns; the foundations survived both history and barbarous force.

"The foundations of our historical knowledge of Early Christianity taken as a whole seem to me unassailable. Although hidden to those eyes which cannot see into the depths, they lie huge and massive and imperishable in the depth."<sup>33</sup>

The other witness in this group has been recognized everywhere as the greatest authority on ancient history, writing in Europe or in our country, during the twentieth century, the late Professor Eduard Meyer. Professor Meyer, who was a Rationalist, and not by any means an evangelical Christian, says of our Gospels,

"It is evident that for our history of Jesus we have by no means to reckon merely with representations of the records of the second, sub-apostolic generation, but are taken back far behind that into the midst of the first generation—people who personally had known him intimately and still preserved a lively recollection of him; and that these old recollections lie under our eyes in manifold forms. There is no ground at all for refusing to accept these oldest traditions as historically trustworthy in all essentials, and in their chronological ordering of the history."<sup>34</sup>

Our Gospels stand today, after a century of severest criticism, as documents of the highest historical value, absolutely trustworthy and unimpeachably accurate.

I think there would be no better way of closing this chapter than by the following words from one of the greatest scholars in the Christian church of the last half century (though we do not follow him at all in many of his interpretations), Bishop Charles Gore, whose writings have probably had more influence over Christian thought in the twentieth century than those of any other one bishop during the same time. When seventy-six years of age, after a lifetime of hard study, Bishop Gore, in concluding a chapter on the trustworthiness of the Gospel records, gave the following confession, and it is repeated here that young people



may know what a great scholar, surely acquainted with everything of importance in modern criticism, thought of the documents which we have here been discussing. "We often feel as we study the acts and words, as described in our documents, that we are present at the very scenes and listening to the very words: and, in justification of this feeling, we reflect that, if it was truly the Father who sent Jesus into the world, that men in the words and works of the messenger might really hear and see Him who sent Him, it is difficult to imagine that He should then have suffered the message to be effaced or seriously misrepresented at the very moment of its delivery to the wider world. Then we recall the promise to the Twelve 'the Paraclete, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall . . . bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you' (John 14:26)." <sup>35</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> C. H. Dodd: *History and the Gospel*, New York, 1938, p. 15. Dr. Dodd is the Norris-Hulse Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, and one of the outstanding New Testament scholars of our day. See also a chapter, "Religion and History," in W. B. Selbie, *The Validity of Christian Belief*, London, 1939, pp. 1-30, and the very excellent essay, *Christianity and History*, by J. Neville Figgis, London, 1905.

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott: *The Validity of the Gospel Record*, New York, 1938, pp. 193, 195.

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott, *ibid.* Professor Scott has been for over a quarter of a century the Professor of New Testament Literature in Union Theological Seminary, New York City.

<sup>4</sup> For a very interesting table, giving some of the various dates we have here noted, together with a number of others not important for our particular purpose, see the *Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, by James Moffatt, New York, 1910, pp. 2-13. It is interesting to observe the prophecy of Professor W. C. Allen, who wrote one of the greatest commentaries on Matthew's Gospel ever produced in our language,

when, thirty years ago, he felt led to say, "I think it probable that critical opinion will shortly move in the direction of, say, A.D. 60, as suggested by Harnack, for the third Gospel, and A.D. 50, or shortly before, for the publication of a Greek second Gospel." W. C. Allen: "The Alleged Catholicism of the First Gospel and Its Date," in the *Expository Times*, July, 1910, Vol. XXI, p. 444.

<sup>5</sup> Professor Donald Wayne Riddle, in his new book, *The Gospels: Their Origin and Growth* (Chicago, 1939), gives it as his conviction that Luke was written "during the last years of Domitian" (p. 206) which would mean, it seems, between 90 and 96 A.D., but in this Professor Riddle would be followed by very few contemporary New Testament scholars. This book appeared after this particular chapter was practically completed. I have read it through with some care, but do not believe that it adds anything of particular importance to the interpretation of these great problems. Other earlier books seem to be just as adequate, and in places, simpler than this one.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 1:1-4. A. T. Robertson: *A Translation of Luke's Gospel with Grammatical Notes*, New York, 1923, p. 13. Sir William Ramsay has very finely said, in regard to Luke's preface to his Gospel: "Either an author who begins with the declaration such as that had mixed freely with many of the eye witnesses and actors in the events which he proceeds to record, or he is a thorough impostor, who consciously and deliberately aims at producing a belief in his exceptional qualifications in order to gain credit for his history. If the author was an impostor, his work remains one of the most incomprehensible and unintelligible facts in literary history." W. M. Ramsay: *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?* p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> A. B. Bruce, in the *Expositor's Greek Testament*, Vol. I, p. 460.

<sup>8</sup> E. Basil Redlich: *The Student's Introduction to the Synoptic Gospels*, London, 1936, pp. 15-17. The author, when writing this book, was the Canon Theologian of Leicester.

<sup>9</sup> E. Basil Redlich, *ibid.*, p. 66. Thirty years before Canon Redlich's book appeared, Kirsopp Lake gave it as his opinion that "it is probably not too much to say that every year after A.D. 50 is increasingly improbable for the production of 'Q.'" *The Expositor*, June, 1909, pp. 494 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Canon Streeter, in his monumental work *The Four Gospels*, says: "For the convenience of the reader I append a list of the



pages I should assign to Q. Brackets signify considerable doubt: Luke III 2a-9, [10-14], 16, 17, 21, 22; IV 1-16a; VI 20-VII 10, 18-35; IX [51-56], 57-60, [61-62]; X 2-16, [17-20], 21-24; XI 9-52; XII 1b-12, 22-59; XIII 18-35; XIV 11, 26, 27, 34, 35; XVI 13, 16-18; XVII 1-6, 20-37; XIX 11-27. Unbracketed verses—272" (p. 291).

<sup>11</sup> Kirsopp Lake: *An Introduction to the New Testament*, New York, 1937, p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> A. T. Robertson: *The Christ of the Logia*, New York, 1924, pp. 37-39.

<sup>13</sup> See an exhaustive and very interesting article by Professor James Denney, "Preaching Christ," in *Hastings' Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, Vol. II, pp. 393-403; and also an article, "Preaching," by M. Scott Fletcher, in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, Vol. II, pp. 258-261.

<sup>14</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott, *ibid.*, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> Frederick C. Grant: *The Growth of the Gospels*, New York, 1933, pp. 45-52.

<sup>16</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott, *ibid.*, pp. 6, 7, 42.

<sup>17</sup> B. B. Warfield: *The Lord of Glory*, New York, 1907, p. 147.

<sup>18</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott: *Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, American Edition, Boston, 1862, pp. 175, 176.

<sup>19</sup> Vincent Taylor: *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition*, London, 1933, pp. 22-25.

<sup>20</sup> Burton Scott Easton: *The Gospel Before the Gospels*, New York, 1928, p. 61.

<sup>21</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott, *ut supra*, p. 57. See also F. C. Grant: *Growth of the Gospels*, pp. 44, 45.

<sup>22</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott, *ibid.*, pp. 17, 18. "A true historical perspective suggests that it would be nearer the truth to say that the apostolic preaching (the *kerygma*) or the facts and beliefs involved in it, created the community, than to say that the community created the apostolic preaching . . . the assumption that the whole great course of Christian history is a massive pyramid balanced upon the apex of some trivial occurrence, is surely a less probable one than that the whole event, the occurrence *plus* the meaning inherent in it did actually occupy a place in history at least comparable with that which the New Testament assigns to it." C. H. Dodd: *History and the Gospel*, pp. 78, 109.

<sup>23</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott, *ibid.*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>24</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott, *ibid.*, pp. 10, 11.

<sup>25</sup> William Arnold Stevens and Ernest DeWitt Burton: *A Harmony of the Gospels for Historical Study*, New York, 1904.

<sup>26</sup> James T. Shotwell: *The History of History*. New York, 1939, Vol. I, p. 329 footnote. See also Ernest Findlay Scott, *ibid.*, pp. 13, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott, *ibid.*, pp. 172, 173.

<sup>28</sup> George P. Fisher: *Essays on the Supernatural Origin of Christianity*, New Edition, New York, 1870, p. 604. On this entire subject see a profound and exhaustive work, very difficult to find these days, *The Jesus of the Evangelists, His Historical Character Vindicated*, by C. A. Row, London, 1868, pp. xx, 425.

<sup>29</sup> John H. Best: *The Miracles of Christ in the Light of Our Present Knowledge*, London, 1937, pp. 52-55.

<sup>30</sup> Pierre Batiffol: *The Credibility of the Gospel*, English Translation, New York, 1912, p. 173. For thorough discussions of the accuracy of the historical statements of the Gospels one should consult, e.g., the remarkable and tremendously influential works of Sir William Ramsay, especially his *Luke the Physician; Pauline and Other Studies*; and, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* (1915); A. T. Robertson: *Luke the Historian in the Light of Research*, 1920; and the monumental work by Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, new revised ed. 1927.

<sup>31</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau: *Emile*, Book IV.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew Martin Fairbairn: *The Philosophy of the Christian Religion*, London, New York, 1902, pp. 327-330. A most remarkable volume, emphasizing the truth pointed out in these paragraphs, a volume richly suggestive, worthy of careful study, is Otto Borchert's, *The Original Jesus*, Eng. trans., New York, 1933, pp. 480. Also, Chap. XIX, "Features of the Gospels Which Are Inconsistent with the Supposition of Their Unhistorical Character," in C. A. Row: *The Jesus of the Evangelists*, pp. 388-425.

<sup>33</sup> Adolf Deissmann: *The New Testament in the Light of Modern Research*, Garden City, 1929, pp. 165, 166.

<sup>34</sup> Eduard Meyer: *Ursprung und Anfänge des Christentums* (*Origin and Beginning of Christianity*), pp. 178.

<sup>35</sup> Charles Gore: *Jesus of Nazareth*, New York, 1929, pp. 208, 209.



# THE SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS IN THE GOSPEL RECORDS OF OUR LORD'S BIRTH

## SYNOPSIS

I. The Miraculous Preservation of the Messianic Line.

II. Divine Foreknowledge Concerning the Babe Jesus.

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III. A Prophecy Referring to the Birthplace of Our Lord That Demands a Recognition of a Supernatural Revelation.

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8. Testimonies to the truthfulness of the Virgin Birth of Christ by three outstanding scholars of our generation.
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  - c. Dr. D. M. Blair, anatomist.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS IN THE GOSPEL RECORDS OF OUR LORD'S BIRTH

GRANTED that the Christian faith must rest solidly upon the historic Christ, how important it is that the facts pertaining to the *beginning* of Christ's life on earth should be firmly established, not upon myth or speculation, but upon evidence of indisputable historical validity. There are only two detailed accounts of the circumstances surrounding our Lord's entrance into this world that have any historic value at all—namely, the first two chapters of the Gospel according to Matthew, and the first two chapters of the Gospel according to Luke. Here, as also in the records relating to the end of Christ's life on earth, involving His Resurrection and Ascension, we have what we might call a veritable accumulation of supernatural elements and events. In this chapter we would draw attention to six of these separate supernatural elements, though we will not have space to discuss any of them but the last with any detail. Some of our readers may not agree with the writer that all of these six elements in the Nativity narratives of our Lord are to be considered as involving the miraculous, but certainly it will be admitted that the Virgin Birth is most emphatically a miracle, and whether the other five will so be considered or not, will not in any way destroy the final verdict of this chapter, which is that *the entrance of Christ into the world was, according to the Gospel records, a supernatural event*. The reason why I have set the following matter out with as great fullness as space allows is because I have not found



some of these points spoken of in the most important commentaries and apologetic works of our day (or for that matter of any previous day).

#### THE MIRACULOUS PRESERVATION OF THE MESSIANIC LINE

In the first seventeen verses of the first chapter of Matthew, we have presented to us a genealogy of Joseph, the husband of Mary, running back through forty-two generations, to Abraham, covering a period of approximately two thousand years. That there are some omissions in this genealogy, and that in differing somewhat from the genealogy recorded in the third chapter of Luke it raises a number of questions, does not in any way invalidate the simple fact which we have just stated, that there is here a record of what we might call "the Messianic Line" running back to the Father of the Hebrew people.

It is of course admitted by all that every living man in the world today has a long line of male ancestors, a father, a grandfather, a great-grandfather, a great-great-grandfather, and so on, back for thousands of years. That we do not know *who* our male ancestors were, hundreds of years ago, does not in any way destroy the fact that such ancestors we have had. There is nothing miraculous in that. But in looking at this genealogy, we must remember that God definitely promised to Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) a seed which would bless the world, from whom kings and nations would come, and, as Paul reminds us, this prophecy ultimately pointed to the Messiah (Gal. 3:16). This promise was given about two thousand years before the Lord was born. Three hundred years later, more or less, Jacob, one of the grandsons of Abraham, on his dying bed told his son Judah that through his line a Ruler in Israel would some day be born (Gen. 49:10). Some six hundred and fifty years later, to a descendant of Judah, David, son of Jesse, God

through the prophet Nathan declared that this Messiah promised to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Judah, would be born of his flesh, that is, would be born of his descendants (II Sam. 7). This was about one thousand and forty years before our Lord was born. Now one begins to see what such a series of promises as these necessitated: that God was required to keep the Messianic line, from Abraham down to the time of the birth of Christ, fertile in such a way that there would be born *in this Davidic line*, coming down through Abraham, Jacob, and Judah, and, subsequently, through David, Solomon, etc., at least one male child in every generation who would grow to manhood and have a son who, in turn, would likewise have a son, until *in this one line*, running back for two thousand years, there would be *an unbroken succession of male descendants until our Lord should be born of Judah*.

At once, someone might ask, how does this involve a miracle? Perhaps we might illustrate this from the life of our great President, Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln (Feb. 12, 1809–April 15, 1865) had four children: Robert Todd, born Aug. 1, 1843—died July 26, 1926; Edward Baker, born March 1, 1846—died February 1, 1850; William Wallace, born Dec. 21, 1850—died February 20, 1862; and Thomas, born April 4, 1853—died July 15, 1871. Of these four children, one died in infancy, one in youth, and one in early manhood, before marriage. The only one of President Lincoln's children to marry was Robert Todd, who had three children: two daughters—Mary, born in 1869 and Jessie Harlan, born in 1875, and one son—Abraham, born in 1873, who died in 1890 before marriage. While it is true that Mary had a son by her husband, whom she named Lincoln, and Jessie had a son by her husband, whom she named Robert Lincoln, yet the *direct male line* from Abraham Lincoln is today *extinct*, an extinction that has taken place *within three generations*. It is now impossible for Abraham Lincoln to have anywhere in this country a grand-



son born of his own son, Robert Todd—or a great grandson, born of a son of Robert Todd. That which terminated in less than a century in the line of this great man, it was necessary for God to continue for two thousand years, until our Lord was born. This to some may not seem evidence of a definite miraculous nature, and with such we will not quarrel. But to us at least it seems most remarkable, and certainly manifests *the definite overruling of Divine Providence.*

#### MIRACULOUS FOREKNOWLEDGE CONCERNING THE BABE JESUS

In Matthew 1:21 we read that the angel said to Joseph, concerning his wife and the babe subsequently to be born, "She shall bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for it is He that shall save His people from their sins." The testimony of this verse to any foreknowledge on the part of the angel is only valid if we believe the record is historically true, that is, if we believe, not that Matthew at a later date ascribed these words to the angel, without any evidence to support his statement, but that the angel did actually utter such a statement as this to Joseph, before the Lord Jesus was born. If the angel did thus speak to Joseph, then the angel knew two things about the babe to be born which no father and mother can ever accurately know about any of their children before birth. In the first place, the angel knew that the babe would be a *son*. When a mother is expecting a little one in the home, she does not tell a close friend that "a son" is expected, or "a daughter," but that "a babe" is soon to arrive in the home. She makes no pretense of knowing whether the babe will be a boy or a girl.

During the spring of last year a man in New Jersey, who claimed to have carefully studied pregnancy charts for years, dared to predict not only the day on which his

wife would give birth to a child, but actually sent out announcements weeks before the child was born, telling his friends, not that "a child" would be born, but that that child would be *a son*. When, however, the little one was brought into the world, it proved to be a daughter! This entire incident was written up with great fullness in all the newspapers of the North Atlantic seaboard at the time of its occurrence.<sup>1</sup> It led the New York Academy of Medicine to declare—"As far as human beings are concerned, we know nothing as yet as far as prediction of sex is concerned."

Furthermore, the angel knew what the babe would do when he grew up—that He would be a Saviour of His people, not one who would save them from their enemies, but one who would save them *from their sins*. Incidentally, of no other person in the Bible is such a statement made. The Bible speaks of the greatest saints of the ancient world, men who walked with God, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Isaiah, Daniel, and, in the New Testament, the Apostle John, the Apostle Paul, etc., but of no other person anywhere in the Bible is it said that he would, during his life, or by his death, save his people, or any people, *from their sins*. The point we are getting at, however, is this: no father or mother knows, when a babe is born, exactly what that babe will do in life. The angel knew what the babe Jesus would do when *He* became a man.

The mother of Martin Luther did not know that her babe would be a reformer; Thomas Edison's mother did not know that her babe would by his inventions illuminate the western world; Abraham Lincoln's mother did not dream that her babe would some day be the President of the United States. We have thousands of men and women in our penitentiaries today, and how fortunate it is that no father or mother ever could foresee, when any one of these prisoners was a babe in their arms, that they would end their days as condemned criminals, behind the iron bars of a penal



institution. No, we do not know, we cannot know, and perhaps in many cases it is most fortunate that we cannot know, what our children will become, and what they will do. The angel did know that the babe, still unborn, would be the Saviour of the world (see also Luke 2:10, 11). Is not such foreknowledge a miracle?

A PROPHECY REFERRING TO THE BIRTHPLACE OF OUR  
LORD THAT DEMANDS A RECOGNITION OF A  
SUPERNATURAL REVELATION

When the wise men came to Jerusalem asking where He was to be found who was born King of the Jews, the learned scribes, in answer to Herod's question regarding this event, immediately acknowledged that the Messiah would be born in *Bethlehem*, for, so they said, thus prophesied Micah (Matt. 2:5-6). The prophecy will be found in the fifth chapter of Micah, and reads as follows: "But thou, Bethlehem, Ephratah, which art little to be among the thousands of Judah, out of thee shall one come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting."

It is recognized on every hand that Micah prophesied about 700 B.C. That he definitely foretold that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem cannot be escaped. It is impossible, by any legitimate critical device, to lift his verse out of the text of the book of Micah. There it stands, there it was read for hundreds of years by faithful Jews before our Lord was born. What possibility is there of any man, by his own wisdom, predicting the birthplace of someone not yet born? No possibility at all! Let a student microscopically examine every piece of American literature down to the year 1830, and he will not find one single phrase even suggesting that a future President of the United States would some day be born in Harlan County, Kentucky. The man who will be President of the United States forty years

from now has already been born, but we do not even know where his birthplace *was*, for we do not know who he is. In 1765, James Boswell spent a few weeks on the island of Corsica, making extended notes of all he saw and heard, but he did not know, he could not know, that *only four years later* a babe would be born on that same island who would, in forty years, have most of Europe at his feet—Napoleon Bonaparte. Micah put his finger on one of the smallest countries in the world in which he lived, Palestine, and in that country, he designated one of the twelve provinces in which the Messiah was to be born, namely, Judah; in that province he put his finger on one small village, Bethlehem, and said that *there* some day the Messiah must be born. Someone will suggest that Micah could have made a good *guess*, and indicate Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Messiah because there David was born. The truth is that David is the only King of Judah that ever was born in Bethlehem; all the other kings, descended from David, generation after generation, until Judah fell, were born in the royal city of Jerusalem, most of them, probably, in the palace. If a prophet of Micah's day would have *guessed* the birthplace of the Messiah, he would certainly have glorified the coming King by designating the royal city as the place of his advent, Jerusalem, not Bethlehem.

Circumstances prevailing at the time of Christ's advent were against the fulfillment of this prophecy, for at this time Joseph and Mary were not living in Bethlehem, but ninety miles away, far up in Galilee, in the hill-town of Nazareth. It was only because an edict had gone out from Rome concerning taxation, which compelled Joseph and Mary at this particular time to go to the ancient home-  
stead of the Davidic family, that Mary and Joseph were in Bethlehem when our Lord was born. If the conception of the Virgin Mary had occurred six months before, the babe would have been born in Nazareth, and carried in Mary's arms to Bethlehem. If the conception had taken place six



months later, she would by the time of the babe's birth, have returned to Nazareth and the babe would then have been born there.

Two other facts we ought not to forget, one, that no Jews have lived in Bethlehem for the last eighteen hundred years; secondly, that there is not a Jewish family anywhere in the world today, which has an unbroken genealogical record today tracing their descent from King David. This means that no Jewish mother today has any *grounds* for hoping that any son of hers will be the Messiah, for she does not know if her family is of David's line. Such a prediction, concerning the locality in which the event referred to would occur seven hundred years after such a prophecy is given, is nothing less than the consequence of a Divine revelation. If this is not evidence for the supernatural, then nothing can be called evidence for it.<sup>2</sup>

### THE SUPERNATURAL SIGN IN THE HEAVENS

We read in the second chapter of Matthew that the wise men were guided from the East (from what point in the East we do not know, possibly Babylon) to Jerusalem, and apparently from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, by a certain star moving in the heavens. There have been thousands of pages written about this star, but it has always been a subject pertaining to the birth of our Lord about which I have felt reluctant to speak, not because I do not believe in the record, but because I am not able to understand the exact nature of this star. In the first place, I do not know how these wise men ever ascertained that the star *would* lead them to the place where the King of the Jews was born, though I know they did, and correctly. Secondly, I do not know if this was a specially created star, which was withdrawn from the sky when it had accomplished its purpose in guiding these wise men, or whether it was a star that is still moving in some orbit in the heavens; nor, if I may

be frank, do I think that anybody else *knows* the solution of these problems.

I think Dr. Adam Fahling, in his recent scholarly *Life of Christ*, has expressed all we can definitely know, and really need to know, about this particular heavenly manifestation. "Whatever the physical nature of the star of the magi, whether it was one of the known or unknown heavenly bodies, whether previously existing, still existing, or not, or whether it was only a star-like supernatural light (so said Chrysostom), moving in the region of the terrene atmosphere (so said Augustine), its purpose was evidently to serve as a sign and a guide. One verse more, and the evangelist could have explained all, but he does not bring that verse. And therefore, accepting the miraculous, and without attempting further explanation, we hold that the magi in their unknown, oriental, native land, and for some undisclosed reason of divine providence, had both a revelation and an astral phenomenon, a sign which betokened the birth of the Jewish Messiah King."<sup>3</sup>

Whatever the star was, it was a supernatural manifestation. However, if any one should feel that the evidence for this particular aspect of our Lord's Nativity is inadequate to serve as evidence for belief in the supernatural, the episode can be put aside, for there is an abundance of material relating to other aspects of our Lord's birth which do, it would seem, absolutely require an acknowledgment of supernatural intervention. To say that one does not understand the meaning of this star is never to be taken as a synonym for not believing in the miraculousness of our Lord's birth.

### THE MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION OF CHRIST

We now approach one of the most important and one of the most disputed episodes in all of the New Testament, the conception of the Lord Jesus in the womb of the Virgin



Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit. The annunciation to Mary by the Angel Gabriel of this stupendous miracle is found in great detail in Luke 1:26-38. Matthew tells us (1:18, 19) that Mary, before the consummation of her betrothal to Joseph, "was found with child of the Holy Ghost." The same writer records for us the brief announcement of such a miraculous conception to Joseph by the Angel of the Lord (verses 20, 21).

#### THE VIRGIN BIRTH NARRATIVES INSEPARABLE PARTS OF THE ENTIRE NATIVITY STORY

The first point we ought to consider in our investigation of the records of this miracle is the place it has in the Nativity narratives of St. Matthew's and St. Luke's Gospels. If the fact of the Virgin Birth is removed from the first chapter of Matthew then, (1) the pregnancy of Mary is left unexplained; (2) the annunciation to Joseph is purely fictitious, and must be also removed; (3) the comment of Matthew himself, indicating that this miraculous conception was the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, must also be removed, and Matthew indicted as a careless writer who attempted to discover the fulfillment of certain prophecies in the Old Testament in events in our Lord's life which really never occurred; and, (4) the entire act of Joseph's kindness toward his wife, and his care for her until the babe Jesus was born (verses 24 and 25), must likewise be deleted. In other words, if the miracle of the Virgin Birth is not an historic fact, then the value of the opening chapter of our New Testament collapses, and we must confess we know absolutely nothing about the birth of our Lord. If the first chapter cannot be believed, how can we be sure that the other chapters are worthy of credence? But this is in exact contradiction to the evidence which we examined in the preceding chapter, in which we found that the Gospel writers are in every way trustworthy,

that they carefully recorded, with historic accuracy, the events concerning which they wrote.

Some suggest that, perhaps, the first two chapters of Matthew were not written by Matthew, but were inserted by a later hand, and are not an original part of Matthew's composition. Without here considering the question of authorship, we should remember that all the most ancient and most trustworthy manuscripts of the Gospels include these two chapters of Matthew. Moreover, Matthew has a fondness for certain words and phrases, so that almost every passage of considerable length in his Gospel contains some of them. These two chapters of which we are speaking contain no less than five Old Testament quotations, accompanied by the regular Matthew formula. "We may say, in fact, that if the Nativity story be not an integral part of the First Gospel, it must be counted one of the cleverest adaptations: a verdict that is not likely to be passed on it by a sane criticism."<sup>4</sup> Professor Moffatt has not exaggerated the situation when he says that, "no hypothesis of literary criticism or textual emendation can disentangle the conception of a Virgin Birth from a story which is wrought together and woven on one loom."<sup>5</sup>

Turning to Luke's more detailed narrative, if the section devoted to the account of the Virgin Birth should be removed, then (1) the account of the journey of Mary to Elizabeth's home in the hill-country of Judah is left hanging in the air, without cause (1:39-56); (2) if the story of the Virgin Birth is not according to fact, we are forced to ask, *how came Mary to be "great with child?"* (2:5); (3) if the story is not true, how did Luke construct out of any story the ancient world possessed, such a pure and exquisite passage as the account of the annunciation to Mary?<sup>6</sup> It is not our particular problem to investigate, or even ask, how Luke came to have this, what we might call, very confidential information concerning the conception of our Lord. (Incidentally, every critic admits that the accounts in Mat-



threw and Luke are distinctly independent, that one does not rest upon or derive from the other.) Still, I believe the words of the great New Testament scholar, Sir William M. Ramsay, on this particular point, might prove helpful to the readers of this book, in attempting to correctly appraise Luke's matchless narrative.

"The beautifully told story of Luke i, ii, is an episode of family history of the most private character. The facts could be known only to a very small number of persons. If Luke had the slightest trace of historical instinct, he must have satisfied himself that the narrative which he gives rested on the evidence of one of the few persons to whom the facts could be known. It is not in keeping with the ancient style that he should formally name his authority; but he does not leave it doubtful whose authority he believed himself to have. 'His mother kept all these sayings hid in her heart'; 'Mary kept all these sayings, pondering them in her heart'; (ii.19, 51) those two sentences would be sufficient. The historian who wrote like that believed that he had the authority of the Mother herself.

"But those two sentences are not the only indications of the source whence Luke believed his information to come. Some facts intimately concerning Elizabeth are mentioned in i.24 and 41; and the narrative carefully explains how these facts became known to Mary, i.36, 41; she had been told. But it is never stated that facts intimately concerning Mary were mentioned by her to Elizabeth. The narrative has the form which is natural only if Mary is understood to be the authority throughout: she simply states what concerned herself, while, in what concerned Elizabeth, she not merely states the facts, but also explains that she has first-hand authority.

"Moreover, what concerned Mary is expressly said to have remained secret, known to herself alone and pondered over in her own heart. It would be a contradiction that this secret of her heart should be the property of others to tell about her. The historian, by emphasizing the silence and secrecy in which she treasured up the facts, gives the reader to understand that she is the authority."<sup>7</sup>

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT  
ACCOUNTS OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

If either a Christian or an unbeliever should open the New Testament to the two narratives recording the birth of Jesus, and read them with an open mind, approaching them just as he would any other piece of exalted noble literature, he could not help but realize that the narratives, whatever else he might think of them, are utterly free from all artificial embellishment, remarkably devoid of unnecessary details, without the slightest tinge of mythological exaggeration, and in every way showing sobriety and restraint in composition. This is definitely contrary to what one would expect to find in the account of such an amazing miracle as the Virgin Birth. We do well at this point to quote the finely worded testimony of that great New Testament scholar, Professor R. J. Knowling, who, in speaking of Matthew's account of the birth of our Lord says: "We hear nothing of any anger or reproach on the part of Joseph against his betrothed, although as a 'righteous man' he feels that only one course is open to him. But with this decision other considerations were evidently still contending,—considerations the very existence of which bore testimony to the purity and fidelity of Mary. The words of the Angel say nothing of the appeasement of indignation, they speak rather of the befitting conquest of hesitation and doubt: 'fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife,' i.e., to take unto thee one who had and still has a claim to that honored and cherished name. No wonder that Dean Plumptre could write that the glimpse given us into the character of Joseph is one of singular tenderness and beauty. If anyone will read this delicate and beautiful description, and place it side by side with that given us in the *Protevangeliium Jacobi*, where, e.g., both Joseph and the priest bitterly reproach Mary, and a whole series of prurient details is given, he will again become painfully aware of the gulf



which separates the Canonical from the Apocryphal Gospels." <sup>8</sup>

THE PRE-EXISTENCE OF OUR LORD NECESSITATES  
SUCH A MIRACULOUS CONCEPTION

The Apostle John tells us (1:1) that the Word who became flesh was from the very beginning with God. Our Lord Himself said, while on earth, that He was actually before Abraham (John 8:58). All the subsequent New Testament Epistles testify to the pre-existence of the Lord Jesus, that is, to the fact that He lived in glory before He came down on earth to be born of Mary (II Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:5-11; Col. 1:15, 16; Eph. 1:4, 10; see also John 1:1-3). <sup>9</sup>

Now it is perfectly evident, at least in these modern scientific days, that no son or daughter ever born in the world had *any existence whatever* one year before his or her birth. Whatever superstitious metaphysical Hindus may believe, all of us educated in the western world today, unanimously reject the idea of reincarnation. We most emphatically do not believe, for example, that George Washington, dead some one hundred and forty years, will appear again as a new-born babe in any home in our country. We do not believe that any husband and wife by natural union can ever give birth to an individual who lived at some previous time on this earth.

When you and I came into the world, we were *new* individuals. When the Lord Jesus came into the world, He was *not* a newly created individual: He was the Eternal Son of God. At His advent, He became, for the first time, a true man; for the first time He was born of a woman; for the first time, He actually lived as a member of our race on this earth. But He had lived from Eternity, previous to His advent, in glory with the Father. If no natural union of husband and wife could ever bring into the world an

individual who had lived previously, then Mary and Joseph by natural union could never have brought into the world the pre-existent Son of God. For one to be conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary, and to be born of her, who was indeed none other than the Eternal Second Person of the Godhead, of necessity required divine intervention, and this is exactly what we have in the narratives of Matthew and Luke.

### THE SINLESSNESS OF CHRIST IMPLIES AN EXTRAORDINARY BIRTH

That our Lord was absolutely without sin, from the day of His birth to the day of His death, the whole of the New Testament testifies. It is a fundamental New Testament conception regarding His character, and absolutely required in the New Testament idea of His vicarious sacrifice for us. The problem immediately arises as to *how* it was possible for any person to be born into a race universally contaminated with sin, to live among a people all of whom were tainted with this dreadful disease, to live a normal life, that is, a life of eating, working, walking, talking, sleeping, praying, to live a normal life in a wicked world, and yet to live absolutely free from sin. Here in itself is a moral phenomena which simply cannot be explained by natural law. How does it happen that only this one Person, in six thousand years of human history, has lived utterly pleasing to God every minute of every hour of every day without sin, in thought, or word, or deed? Such a miracle as this demands, among other things, a miraculous entrance into life.

Some will immediately ask, does not the fact that Jesus was, even though miraculously conceived, born of Mary, involve His acquiring a sinful nature from His mother? Mary was, certainly, a member of a sinful race, and thus did partake of the sinful taint of human nature. Why, then,



was not the sinfulness of her human nature communicated to the nature of her first-born son? This is an important point. The answer to this question will be found in the words of the angel to Mary herself. Not only was our Lord divinely conceived by the Holy Spirit, but Mary, during all the months that intervened between His conception and His birth, was overshadowed by the same Holy Spirit. "The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the most high shall overshadow thee; wherefore also the holy thing that is begotten of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35).

As Dr. G. Campbell Morgan has wonderfully expressed it, "The angel answered the biological question, saying: The thing shall be done by the direct act of God, the power of the Most High, the Holy Spirit, wrapping thee round, overshadowing thee, producing in thy womb the Man-Child; and *also*, by that same act, by that same energy, by that same force, the Holy Spirit overshadowing, that which is begotten shall be held from contamination with the sin of thy nature, and in human nature. It shall be holy. It shall have being in thy womb by the act of God; and it shall be held from contamination with the sinfulness of thy nature, by the same act of God. The possibility of the Virgin Birth, and the way of the Immaculate Conception were declared by the angel."

While quoting from Dr. Campbell Morgan, it may not be out of place to give the concluding paragraph of his remarkable exposition of this particular portion of the Nativity narrative, inasmuch as it bears directly upon the subject of the supernaturalism of our Lord. "This is the Biblical interpretation of the Person of Jesus. A naturalistic philosophy necessarily cannot accept this as true. Then that philosophy is called upon to account for Jesus in some other way; and the only way to do that, is to do what naturalistic philosophy does, change the Jesus that is presented in this New Testament. To deny the supernatural origin of Jesus, is to make

Him natural merely. To do that invalidates the records, not of His Being alone, but of His teaching, and His power in human history. The reason why men reject this story is discovered in their philosophy of God. If He is limited by their knowledge, this thing cannot be. But we are not among the number of those who hold this philosophy of God. We do not think of Him as imprisoned within the laws we have discovered, and the forces we know. Therefore the answer of the angel carries our rational consent; because it is the only accounting for Him, that satisfies our reason." <sup>10</sup>

Another point to be remembered in our discussion of the Virgin Birth of our Lord is that it is in perfect conformity to all that we know of the subsequent life, and all that we know of the Person, of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even such a critic as Dr. Charles A. Briggs was forced to admit that, "historically and logically, the divinity of Christ and the Incarnation are bound up with the Virgin Birth, and no man can successfully maintain any one of them without maintaining all." <sup>11</sup> As another has said, "While through Mary, Jesus was vitally incorporated with the race, and without sin, inherited our entire humanity, he had a paternity befitting a life indwelt with all the fullness of the Godhead. Surveying the breadth and length and height and depth of the Incarnation, must we not say that it would have been unnatural if the birth of the Saviour had been natural." <sup>12</sup>

In fact, as Dr. Warfield reminds us, "It is just in proportion as men lose their sense of the divine personality of the Messianic King who is Immanuel, God with Us, that they are found to doubt the necessity of the Virgin Birth; while in proportion as the realization of this fundamental fact of the Christianity of the New Testament remains vivid and vital with them, do they instinctively feel that it is alone consonant with it that this Being should acknowledge none other Father than that Father which is in Heaven, from whom alone He came forth to save the world." <sup>13</sup>



THE DOCTRINE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH HAS BEEN  
BELIEVED BY THE CHURCH FROM  
ITS BEGINNING

It must never be forgotten that the entire Christian Church, from its very beginning, has declared its faith in the doctrine of the Virgin Birth of the Lord. Luke, who says he examined many documents in the writing of his own Gospel, would seem to imply that this doctrine was *already* the faith of the Church even when he wrote, for he says that the things he writes are, "those matters which have been fulfilled among us," or, as the margin more accurately has it, "those matters which have been fully established among us."

Belief in the Virgin Birth "appeared in the earliest form of the Roman creed, which is placed by Kattenbusch as early as the year 100, and cannot be much later, the words being 'He was born of the Holy Ghost from the Virgin Mary.' This corresponds with the fact that we find it part of the regular Church tradition from the beginning of the second century. So Ignatius writing to the Ephesians (Chapters 18-19), said 'For our God, Jesus the Christ, was conceived in the womb by Mary, according to a dispensation, of the seed of David but also of the Holy Ghost.' " <sup>14</sup>

THE EXTRAORDINARY INFLUENCE OF THESE BIRTH-STORIES

Dr. Arthur C. Headlam, now one of the most distinguished Bishops in the Church of England, and for some years the Principal of King's College, London, makes a fine point in his very significant volume on the miracles of the New Testament, one so seldom stated in treatises on the Virgin Birth, that we take the liberty of quoting him in full.

"I would suggest first of all that the extraordinary hold that the birth-stories of Jesus have had on the Christian mind is some evidence for them. Christianity was to be a religion for all peoples; it is a religion, not a philosophy; a religion capable of

being embodied in simple stories which appeal to the human mind, to the simple and untaught as well as to the educated and thoughtful. It may be argued that the stories have had their day. I think not. I think that probably most of us will feel that however lofty may be the theological and philosophical conceptions which have been built up round Christianity and appeal to our intellectual needs, it is still the simple Gospel narratives which have the greatest hold upon our heart. Our own religion is simple, and a simple story means much more for us than an elaborate dogmatic statement. A Christmas hymn can stir us far more than many a Christmas sermon. Of course, it might be argued that we are dealing with myths, true in idea but not in history. I do not think it likely that such prominent parts of the Gospel would be untrue, nor do I see any particular grounds for thinking that they are."<sup>15</sup>

### OBJECTIONS TO THE VIRGIN BIRTH

There are a number of objections to the Virgin Birth continually raised by those who deny the supernatural aspects of our Lord's life, and even by many who claim to be thorough-going Christians, but who refuse to accept this particular teaching of the New Testament scriptures. It is essential that we give some careful attention to the main criticisms brought against this important doctrine.

### THAT IT IS A BIOLOGICAL IMPOSSIBILITY

Some years ago a great deal was heard about the "impossibility" of such a thing as Christ being born of the Virgin Mary in any other way than by natural generation, it being claimed that such a birth was contrary to all biological law. The idea of an egg cell developing without fertilization by a male element or sperm cell is called *parthenogenesis*. For some decades, parthenogenesis was considered a biological impossibility, but today it is recognized as frequently happening, both in some plants and in



some animals. In fact, the 14th Edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* gives two full columns to this very subject. And the article begins, not by arguing that such is possible, but by stating that such a law actually prevails in nature. "A drone bee develops from an unfertilized egg, thus having a mother, the queen, but no father. . . . In three classes of animals, there is a frequent exhibition of parthenogenesis—namely in rotifers, crustaceans, and insects. Among insects, it occurs in many gall flies and saw flies. . . . Among plants, the development of an egg cell without fertilization is seen in *chara crinita*, one of the water stoneworts, represented in Northern Europe by female plants only. Parthenogenesis is the rule in the dandelion, and also occurs in some hank weeds."<sup>16</sup> No critic of the Virgin Birth today would dare speak of the "biological impossibility" of such an event. We dismiss this particular criticism without further discussion.

### THE THEORY OF SUPPOSED CONTRADICTIONS

Others attempt to invalidate the New Testament evidence for the Virgin Birth by insisting that there are contradictions between Matthew's and Luke's account. But, as Professor Orr has well said, "It seems much more remarkable that there are agreements, for if we study them carefully, they prove to be more numerous than one would, at first, believe." Professor Orr then proceeds to give a list of twelve points, "which lie really on the surface of the narratives, yet give very nearly the gist of the whole story. (1) Jesus was born in the last days of Herod. (2) He was conceived by the Holy Ghost. (3) His mother was a Virgin. (4) She was betrothed to Joseph. (5) Joseph was of the house and lineage of David. (6) Jesus was born at Bethlehem. (7) By divine direction He was called Jesus. (8) He was declared to be a Saviour. (9) Joseph knew beforehand of Mary's condition and its cause. (10) Nevertheless he

took Mary to wife, and assumed full paternal responsibilities for her child; was from the first *in loco parentis* to Jesus. (11) The Annunciation and birth were attended by revelations and visions. (12) After the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary dwelt in Nazareth. This, however, is not the whole. . . . But careful inspection of the narratives shows that, even in the respects in which they are divergent, so far from being discrepant, they are really, in a singular way, complementary; that where a careless glance suggests contrariety, there is really deep and beautiful harmony."<sup>17</sup> This compact statement should be closely studied.

#### THAT THE STORY WAS WRITTEN TO SHOW A FULFILLMENT OF PROPHECY

Some have attempted to discover the origin of the Gospel accounts of the Virgin Birth of Christ in the Messianic expectation of the Jewish people at the time of Christ's advent, making out a case that, because of the prediction of Isaiah 7:4, wherein it is announced that the Messiah would be born of a Virgin, it was necessary for Matthew and Luke to *construct* such a story as this, that the prophecy might seem to be fulfilled. The answer to this is a simple one: there was absolutely no expectation, among the Jewish people of Christ's day, or among any of the Rabbinical teachers preceding the advent of Christ, that the Messiah would be (by miraculous conception) born of a Virgin. There is not one single sentence, in any contemporary Jewish writings, that would indicate that the Messiah would be born as Matthew and Luke indicate He was born. In fact, the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14 seems to have been either lost sight of, or was not understood by the Jewish people, until it *was* actually fulfilled in Christ's Virgin Birth, and then it was recalled. The simple facts of the case make it impossible that Matthew and Luke should ever have built up such a remarkable story around a verse like this, which was not being discussed



with these implications during the time of Christ's advent on earth.

### THE SO-CALLED "ARGUMENT FROM SILENCE"

One of the most important arguments continually brought against the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is the so-called "silence" of the Gospels of Mark and John, and the Epistles of St. Paul, concerning this fundamental teaching of Matthew and Luke. This has been replied to again and again, and we believe in a very convincing way, but the words of Professor Headlam on this point are so unusually fine and conclusive, that we take the liberty of quoting his entire answer to this objection.

"Now the argument from silence is always precarious. How little stress can be laid on it in this case a single instance will shew. There is no reference to the Virgin Birth in the Acts of the Apostles. This is really quite natural, because it was not part of the ordinary apostolic missionary preaching. It would not be likely that it should be. It did not give any proof to outsiders. It was something that the convert would learn later, and would then harmonize with his other beliefs; but it was not part of the missionary preaching of the Apostles such as S. Luke gives in the Acts. There was therefore no need for it to be mentioned; but we know that S. Luke also wrote the Gospel, and he wrote it before the Acts. Therefore, he clearly knew of the Virgin Birth as part of the Christian teaching. If we had not the Gospel but only the Acts, it would at once have been argued that the author of that book had no knowledge of the Virgin Birth. This is an instance which brings out how little stress can be laid on the argument from silence. The writers of the books of the New Testament composed their works to meet the needs of their own day, and did not write to assist people in the twentieth century in the particular controversy in which they might be engaged.

"As for the omission of the doctrine in the Gospels of St. Mark and St. John, we must content ourselves with asserting that there is nothing in either Gospel which could make us doubt the story

of the Virgin Birth, and that it was not in accordance with the plan of the writers that they should give any account of the Nativity. All the books of the New Testament are very short, and it is obvious that the writers in producing them must in each case have confined themselves to the particular purpose they had in view.

"Similarly it is never safe to argue from the silence of S. Paul. His letters were in all cases occasional documents. They assume the ordinary Christian preaching and the ordinary knowledge of the Gospel history. They were not written to provide future ages with a complete idea of what Christianity was, and in a sense it must be considered accidental that any particular point of early Christianity is found in them. Supposing that I Corinthians had not survived, it would have been the customary thing to argue that S. Paul knew nothing at all about the Lord's Supper. S. Paul's Christological doctrine was of such a character that it would be natural for him to believe that our Lord was born in a remarkable manner. . . . It is more important to emphasize the general statement of S. Paul that the Second Man was from heaven, and his conception of our Lord as free from any taint of Adam's sin such as might be engendered by ordinary human birth. We may not have sufficient evidence to assert that S. Paul must have known the story and must have accepted it, although the fact of his relation to S. Luke would make it extremely probable. We can argue quite definitely that he had such a conception of the person of Christ, of His heavenly origin, of His freedom from sin, as might seem to justify the belief in His supernatural birth."<sup>18</sup>

In the matter of the "silence" of St. Paul, Professor Orr makes a very interesting point, when he reminds us of the deeper teachings of Romans 1:3, 4, where it is said that Christ was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead." Professor Orr says, "I confess it is difficult for me to read this passage in Romans and rid my mind of the impression that there is a relation between it and what we find in Luke 1:35."<sup>19</sup> St. Paul's profound passage regard-



ing the incarnation of our Lord, Phil. 2:6-8, certainly implies a miraculous entrance into human life, and what of his phrase, "made of a woman," in Gal. 4:4?

### THE THEORY OF MYTHOLOGICAL ORIGIN

We must consider just one more attempt on the part of those who deny the truth of the Virgin Birth to account for this story appearing in the Gospel records, i.e. the attempt to trace it to Greek or Babylonian myths. This has been a favorite argument not only with rationalists, who have no regard at all for the Person of our Lord Jesus, but it is also frequently used, we regret to say, even by many professors in theological seminaries.

The two fundamental and, it seems to me, absolutely conclusive arguments against such an idea as this are, first, that in pagan mythology, it is not claimed that any hero is born of a virgin, and, secondly, that it would be utterly horrifying for any Jewish writer or early Christian Gentile writer of the first century to attempt to construct the story of Christ's birth and infancy from the sordid elements of pagan myths. In regard to the non-existence of virgin births in pagan mythology, we, of course, must admit that many of the Greek, and Babylonian, and Egyptian deities were said to have been born in some unusual or (as they claimed) supernatural manner. But not only do these myths refer for the most part to beings that never actually existed, but the records in themselves always involve lustful, sensual elements, which are wholly absent in the accounts of our Lord's nativity. Among the Greeks and the Babylonians, a god or goddess would be said to be brought into the world in some miraculous way either by the co-habitation of some heavenly being with a woman on earth, or, even more vulgarly, by the adulterous relationships of the gods and goddesses themselves. In no account of these fictitious births do we read of an actual

*virgin* giving birth to a son. One can read hundreds of pages of these mythical stories and realize anew when he has finished what a chasm separates these humanly created and often wicked stories from the exquisite, beautiful, holy records of our Lord's own birth. In fact, as Dr. Thorburn has said, "All these various stories of supernatural conceptions and births, which we meet with in folklore and the history of mythology have this one point in common—they serve to point not so much to the similarity as to the complete *contrast* and dissimilarity which exists between the Christian Birth-story and the tales which were current in various pagan circles." <sup>20</sup>

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, from time to time, in his writings, in advocating a mythological origin for the Virgin Birth story in the Gospels, compares this account of our Lord's birth to references in ancient literature to the birth of Buddha, Zoroaster, Caesar Augustus, Plato, and Perseus.<sup>21</sup> Let us look at the facts for the moment. As for the birth of Plato, the great Greek scholar, Prof. J. P. Mahaffy, begins his famous chapter on Plato in his *History of Classical Literature* with the following two sentences: "Plato, whose proper name was Aristocles, was born either 429 or 427 B.C., at Ægina, where his father held property. His father, Ariston, son of Aristocles, and his mother, Peristione (sister of Charmides), were both of ancient and noble descent." As to the birth of Perseus, who, by the way, was only a god of Greek mythology, and never actually lived and walked and suffered on earth, as did the Lord Jesus of whom we are speaking, one of the greatest authorities on Greek mythology begins his discussion of this Greek god as follows: "The daughter of Acrisius was Danaë, of surpassing loveliness. In consequence of an oracle which had prophesied that the son of Danaë would be the means of his grandfather's death, the hapless girl was shut in an underground chamber, that no man might love or wed her. But Jupiter, distilling himself into a



shower of gold, flooded the girl's prison, wooed, and won her. Their son was Perseus." Such an account of a birth is as far from the beautiful, reasonable, believable narrative in Luke's Gospel as the East is from the West.

As for Zoroaster, many of the accounts of his birth are so vulgar that we are prevented from repeating them in this book, but we will note one of them which is not too gross. "According to another account which we find in Shahras-tani God hid the spirit of Zoroaster in a tree (perhaps the Haoma plant) which he caused to grow in the highest heaven and which he afterward planted on the top of a mountain in Adarbaijan. There he mingled the spirit of Zoroaster, the Frohar, with the milk of a cow, which the father of Zoroaster drank. From this, seed and a portion of flesh passed into the body of Zoroaster's mother, who in the course of her pregnancy had a prophetic dream, which announced to her the divine greatness of her son." There is certainly nothing here which either Matthew or Luke could ever have used for the foundation of our Lord's birth.<sup>22</sup>

As regards Caesar Augustus, every historian knows that his mother was Atia, the niece of Julius Caesar, and his father was Caesar Octavius of a respectable family from Velitrae.

Furthermore, the attitude of the early Christians, as well as of the Hebrews, whether they were Christians or not, in the first century of our era, was utterly antagonistic to all pagan myths, and the idolatrous practices that accompanied contemporary paganism. Christianity did not take its materials from paganism, but by its coming into the world, it was that which destroyed paganism. *There is not a single "mythical" element in all the four Gospel stories.* There seems to be here a previously unknown beauty and purity characterizing the thoughts and acts of men, as though a veritable breath of heaven had fallen upon them. There is a loftiness, a sweetness, a heaven-

liness, a freedom from all the foolish traditions and vain imaginations of men, in the Gospel stories that is really amazing, when we consider that they were written in the very midst of an atmosphere that had been saturated with paganism for centuries. If the Hebrews of Christ's day could rise up in revolt against Herod because he attempted to hang images in the Temple of Jerusalem, how utterly inconceivable it would be for these same Hebrew people, with the spirit of Christ dwelling in them, to ever even conceive of attempting to explain the advent of Christ into the world by these sordid, historically unfounded stories from a pagan world which they themselves looked down upon.

#### TESTIMONIES TO THE TRUTHFULNESS OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

Just this week I happened to be turning the pages of a very sane, stimulating, but not too well-known book, *We Would Know Jesus*, by Dr. John A. Scott, Professor of Greek in Northwestern University for the last forty years. Professor Scott received his Doctor of Philosophy Degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1897, continuing advanced study in Gottingen and Munich. During his brilliant career, he has been President of the American Philological Association, and President of the Classical Association of the Midwest and South. Dr. Scott published this particular book at the age of seventy, so that we can safely say that whatever is here written may be considered as the mature convictions of one of the greatest Greek scholars of our country, a man of the highest intellectual ability, who knows what is worth knowing about classical literature, and is able to accurately appraise the historical value of any ancient record. In turning the pages of this book, as I have said, I came across a remarkable paragraph relating to Luke's account of the very matter we are discussing, and I would like to place Professor Scott's



verdict on this matter before my young readers, that they might have the assurance of knowing what one of our leading scholars, even of this modern day, is willing to tell the world is his own conviction regarding this supernatural event. "Luke was not only a Doctor, and a historian, but he was one of the world's greatest men of letters. He wrote the clearest and the best Greek written in that century. . . . Without Luke, we never could have had a report from a competent man of science on the birth from a Virgin. If Jesus had two human parents, why did the shrewd Gentile Physician never suspect that fact? Since the arguments were sufficient to convince Dr. Luke, we know that we are dealing with no ignorant childish fancy."<sup>23</sup>

I think that to get the full emphasis of this quotation, we ought to repeat the question which Dr. Scott asked: "If Jesus had two human parents, why did the shrewd Gentile Physician never suspect that fact?"

And while we are here speaking of Luke as a physician, we might do well to quote what one of the greatest surgeons of our country has to say about this very matter, i.e., about Luke's account of the Virgin birth. The physician I refer to is Dr. Howard A. Kelly. A word concerning the career of this distinguished surgeon will give added weight to the testimony we are about to quote. Dr. Kelly received his Bachelor of Arts Degree from the University of Pennsylvania in 1877, when he was nineteen years of age, and his M.D. degree from the same University in 1882. At the beginning of his brilliant professional career he was the founder of the Kensington Hospital, in Philadelphia; for thirty years he was one of the four world-famous members of the medical school of Johns Hopkins University, as Professor of Gynecology and Obstetrics, 1889-1899, Professor of Gynecology, 1899-1919, and emeritus Professor since 1919; Gynecological Surgeon in Johns Hopkins Hospital, 1899-1919; and Consulting Gynecologist in the same institution since 1919. He has been the chief surgeon and

radiologist in the Howard A. Kelly Hospital in Baltimore since 1892. Among other honors that have come to him are the Hunterian lectureship at the Mansion Lord Mayor of London—1928, Honorary Curator of the Division of Reptiles and Amphibians in the University of Michigan, Honorary Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, together with many other honorary fellowships in other scientific societies, Commander of the Order of Leopold (Belgium, 1920), Order of the Cross of Mercy (Serbia, 1922), etc. Dr. Kelly is the author of a great many text books in the subject of gynecology, together with something over five hundred articles in different medical journals published in this country and abroad. His work from which we quote, *A Scientific Man and the Bible*, was written when Dr. Kelly was sixty-seven years of age.

"The Bible being a living book, its right use soon genders conviction, and so as I read, unsophisticated and as a child, these lofty and spiritually beautiful narratives drive arrows of conviction deep into my heart, first arousing wonder, then adoration and absolute faith, and then follow the very fruits of the life. . . . The Virgin Birth is the great key to the Bible storehouse. If I reject the Virgin Birth, the New Testament becomes a dead, man-made letter, recounting the well intentioned imaginings of honest but misguided men. . . . He who violently wrenches the narratives of the Virgin Birth from the New Testament in order to be consistent must also uniformly expunge all other miracles and with them the atoning death, the Resurrection, the Ascension, and the present mediatorial office of our Lord. The Virgin Birth is a fact fully established by competent testimony and abundant collateral evidences, believed by men all through the ages as a necessary factor in their salvation, secured by an ever-living, ever-acting Saviour, viewed with wonder by angels in heaven and acknowledged by the Father." <sup>24</sup>

Supplementing Dr. Kelly's fine testimony, it may be of interest to all of our readers to have a second, later testimony, from another country, and from another distin-



guished surgeon, Dr. D. M. Blair, formerly the Professor of Anatomy and Dean of the Medical Faculty of the University of London, and, when this particular verdict was given, in 1936, the Regius Professor of Anatomy in the University of Glasgow.

"It may be well to explain why such special regard can be paid to a physician of nearly two thousand years ago. Had Luke lived nearly one thousand years ago, it would be a very different thing: no weight could have been put on the medical testimony of a physician of those times which were the Dark Ages in medicine as in much else. But Luke was a product of the Greek medical school that flourished from the time of Hippocrates in the fourth century before Christ to the days of Galen in the second century of the Christian era, and is recognized as having been imbued with a true scientific spirit. Diagnosis, in this school, meant logical deduction from careful observation. . . . Such, then, was the man whom the Holy Spirit chose to write that Gospel, and the first history of the Christian Church. Of what advantage to us is it that he was a doctor? The answer to that question begins in the very first chapter of his Gospel. Has it ever struck you that the only circumstantial account of the Virgin Birth of our Lord is found in the one Gospel written by a medical man? Luke goes into extraordinary detail. It is as though his professional instincts were aroused and he said to himself, 'Here is a marvellous thing; it is my duty, as a medical man, to see that a careful record is made of all relevant details. . . .' It is essential to recognize, without any equivocation whatever, the Divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to deny the Virgin Birth is the first step towards denying that Divinity."<sup>25</sup>

### SUMMARY

The narratives of our Lord's birth are emphatically records of supernatural events. If they are not true, we know nothing of the circumstances attending our Lord's advent, for the miraculous aspects of His birth are so interwoven with the natural, commonplace aspects of the

same event, that to repudiate the former as unhistorical is to have the entire story evaporate before our eyes. If the narratives are not true, these two writers, Matthew and Luke, must be admitted to be men of the greatest literary genius, and at the same time undependable inventors of fiction. But there is every reason for believing that the narratives *are* true, and, there is no theory or theories that have ever been proposed that can reasonably explain away these narratives on a rationalistic basis. If Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, the Virgin Birth is not only credible but necessary. If Christ lived throughout His life without one iota of sin, such sinlessness can in part be accounted for by the Virgin Birth. If Christ made His exodus from death by the miracle of the Resurrection, and His exit from this world by His ascension, we can easily believe He entered humanity by such a miracle as the Virgin Birth.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The facts of the case are as follows: Mr. Sidney A. Forlet, of Newark, N. J., sent out cards in March, 1939, announcing the expected birth of a son to occur June 17 or 18. On June 20th, at the Beth Israel Hospital, Mrs. Forlet gave birth to a baby girl, to the utter astonishment of the father, who claims to have made a study of pregnancy charts for some years past, and asserted he was definitely capable of predicting the time of birth and the sex of the child to be born. In both matters he was wrong. The above information is taken from the *New York Times* of June 21st, page 7, column 4, and June 25th, Section II, page 8, column 3.

<sup>2</sup> For more elaborate consideration of this interesting subject of Micah's prophecy, may the author take the liberty of referring to two articles of his, "Why was Bethlehem the Birthplace of our Lord?", in *Revelation*, December, 1936; and, "The Miraculous Choice of Bethlehem," in the *Sunday School Times*, Dec. 5, 1936. The statement here made regarding Jewish genealogies existing today going back to the time of David, is made upon the basis



of a long and interesting letter concerning this subject from Professor Meyer Waxman, Professor of Hebrew literature in the Hebrew Theological College of Chicago, in which this point is extensively elaborated upon.

<sup>3</sup> Adam Fahling: *The Life of Christ*, St. Louis, 1936, pp. 111, 112.

<sup>4</sup> See F. C. Burkitt: *Evangelian Da Mepharrisha*, pp. 258, 259, quoted in James Orr: *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, New York, 1907, pp. 51, 52.

<sup>5</sup> James Moffatt: *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, New York, 1910, p. 251.

<sup>6</sup> The late Senator Albert J. Beveridge was acknowledged a master of literary style. His work on Abraham Lincoln was the result of years of incessant labor, and painstaking research. This is his description of the environment in which Lincoln was born: "Far from the turmoil across the mountains, in a log cabin in the heart of Kentucky, on February 12, 1809, Abraham Lincoln was born. The earth was the floor of that shelter. The roof of rough slabs was held in place by poles and stones. In the log walls a small square opening, possibly covered with greased paper, let in a scant, dim light. Two long, broad slabs, fastened together and attached by hinges of wood or of hide to the side of a cut in the walls high enough for a man to pass through, served as a door. At one end of this cabin was a rude fireplace of stone with a chimney of sticks and clay. In a corner opposite was a pallet or bed, the frame made by a crotched stick driven into the ground upon which the ends of a long and short pole rested, the other ends thrust between the logs of the cabin. Across this frame were placed rough slats, and upon these bedding of some sort was spread. The whole structure was of wood, no iron being available. This log hut stood on the edge of a tract of poor land, with few trees and covered by tall, coarse grass. Immediately in front of the cabin the ground sloped sharply downward. A spring flowed from a horizontal cave-like channel of rock in the low hillside and, dropping abruptly into another but perpendicular opening of rock, disappeared." Albert J. Beveridge: *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858*, Vol. I, Boston, New York, 1928. Chapter I, "Kentucky: Birth and Childhood," p. 23.

This is certainly a good piece of literary work, but now compare it with Matthew's account of our Lord's birth (1:18-25), or with Luke's account of the Annunciation to Mary (1:26-38), or of the adoration of the shepherds (2:8-20), and realize at once

the infinite superiority of the New Testament records to Senator Beveridge's carefully worded paragraph. Will his lines be studied and sung by millions of people for nineteen hundred years to come?

<sup>7</sup> W. M. Ramsay: *Was Christ Born at Bethlehem?* London, 1898, pp. 74, 75.

<sup>8</sup> R. J. Knowling, art. "Birth of Christ," in Hastings' *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, i, 206; also E. Digges LaTouche: *Christian Certitude*, London, 1910, pp. 147, 148.

<sup>9</sup> On this entire subject of the Pre-existence of Christ, nothing could be finer than the superb discussion by Thomas Whitelaw, in his (now) too-little known work, *How Is the Divinity of Jesus Depicted in the Gospels and Epistles?* London, 1883, pp. 11-110; also, Alexander Patterson: *The Greater Life and Work of Christ*, 2d ed., 1898, pp. 17-127.

<sup>10</sup> G. Campbell Morgan: *The Gospel According to Luke*, 1931, p. 24.

<sup>11</sup> Charles A. Briggs, "The Virgin Birth of Our Lord," *American Journal of Theology*, April, 1908, XII, p. 201.

<sup>12</sup> John McNaugher: *The Virgin Birth of Jesus*, Pittsburgh, 1939, p. 30.

<sup>13</sup> B. B. Warfield: *Christology and Criticism*, New York, 1929, p. 454.

<sup>14</sup> A. C. Headlam: *The Miracles of the New Testament*, London, 1914, pp. 280, 281.

<sup>15</sup> A. C. Headlam, *ibid.*, pp. 295, 296.

<sup>16</sup> Sir John Arthur Thomson, art. "Parthenogenesis," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. 14th ed., XVII, 341, 342.

<sup>17</sup> James Orr: *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, pp. 36, 37.

<sup>18</sup> A. C. Headlam, *ut supra*, pp. 278-281. See the similar testimony of T. Zahn, in Orr, pp. 220-223.

<sup>19</sup> James Orr, *ibid.*, pp. 119, 120. Those who wish to examine this particular subject, should read Bishop Richard J. Cooke's *Did Paul Know of the Virgin Birth?* New York, 1926, pp. 152.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas James Thorburn: *A Critical Examination of the Evidences for the Doctrine of the Virgin Birth*, London, 1908, p. 158.

<sup>21</sup> As, e.g., in his *As I See Religion*, 1932, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> The references for this material are J. P. Mahaffy, *A History of Classical Greek Literature*, Vol. II, Part I, 5th ed., London, 1910, p. 162; Charles M. Gayley, *The Classic Myths in English Literature and in Art*, new ed., 1911, p. 208; Elwood Worcester, *Studies in the Birth of the Lord*, New York, 1932, p. 168.



<sup>23</sup> John A. Scott: *We Would Know Jesus*, Chicago, 1936, pp. 124, 131.

<sup>24</sup> Howard A. Kelly: *A Scientific Man and the Bible*, Philadelphia, 1925, pp. 89, 90, 94.

<sup>25</sup> D. M. Blair: *A Doctor Looks at the Bible*, London, 1936, pp. 17-19. Dr. Briggs well said, "It should be said that St. Luke who gives us the fullest statement as to the Virgin Birth was a physician as well as a historian and, undoubtedly, aware of the biological processes connected with conception and generation. Doubtless modern biologists know more than he did about those subjects; but the ancient Jewish, Greek and Roman physicians knew as much as the moderns of everything connected with conception and generation that can in any way have to do with the doctrine of the Virgin Conception and Virgin Birth. If Luke saw no biological difficulties, and if the greatest physicians the world has produced have not hesitated to answer the doctrine, it is vain for any modern biologist to object to it. They do not in fact object from biological reasons but because they are unwilling to accept the supernatural or any kind of divine interposition in the world." *Ut supra*, XII, p. 203. See also his *Incarnation of the Lord*, New York, 1902, Chap. X, pp. 215-235.

# THE NATURE AND TESTIMONY OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES

## SYNOPSIS

- I. The Importance of the Gospel Miracles in the Christian Religion.
- II. Miracles Defined.
- III. A Classification of Christ's Miracles.
- IV. Characteristics of the Miracles Recorded in the Gospels.
  1. They are an inseparable part of the Gospel narratives.
  2. These records of miracles contain nothing unreasonable or silly.
  3. The restraint that marks the records.
  4. Miracles do not become more frequent as time passes.
  5. Christ's miracles were in the physical realm and could be appraised by physical senses.
  6. His miracles were done publicly.
  7. His miracles are not being duplicated today by modern science.
  8. The results of Christ's efforts in working miracles were instantly achieved.
  9. Christ's motives in performing miracles were always high and worthy.
  10. Christ Himself emphasized the great importance of his miracles.
- V. Theories Proposed to Account for These Miraculous Acts Rationalistically.
  1. The fraud theory.
  2. The theory of mythical origin.
  3. That they were accomplished by natural causes unknown to the disciples.
  4. The theory of auto-suggestion.



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5. That those who witnessed Christ's acts and believed they were miracles were people of extreme credulity.

6. The theory of "spiritual interpretation."

7. Hume's famous attack upon miracles.

VI. Miracles and Natural Law.

VII. The Relation of Christ's Miracles to the Person of Christ.

VIII. The Ultimate Purpose of Christ's Miracles.

IX. The Possibility of Miracles Determined by Our Conception of God.

X. The Testimony of Dr. Samuel Johnson.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE NATURE AND TESTIMONY OF CHRIST'S MIRACLES

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOSPEL MIRACLES IN THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

As much as such subjects as the Virgin Birth of Christ, the sinless character of Christ, the deity of Christ have been discussed from age to age, it is His miracles that have been, we might say, the great battle ground on which has been waged for centuries the real conflict regarding the reality or non-reality of the supernatural. From the days of the Apostles, down to the present time, the entire Christian Church with, of course, the exception of the left wing of modernism, which we recognize comprises an ever-increasing number of adherents, has always emphatically insisted upon the reality of the miraculousness of certain acts performed by Christ when on earth. As the late Professor George P. Fisher once wrote, "If the miraculous events be established, the speculative objections to the doctrinal system of Christianity at once fall to the ground. All opposition of this sort is then silenced, if not satisfied. On the other hand, if the miracles are disproved, Christianity is stripped of its essential peculiarity. The central fact of a Supernatural Interposition, having for its end the restoration of men to communion with God, is lost. . . . Did Christ do the works which none other men could do? This is the vital question—we might almost say, the only question. The case of Christianity rests upon the decision of it. Its claim to a rank essentially different from that



of other religions and philosophies stands or falls according as this question is answered."<sup>1</sup>

If there is sufficient evidence to convince an unprejudiced person that Christ actually performed true miracles, then it will not be impossible to believe, either in the Virgin Birth of Christ, in His Transfiguration, or in His Resurrection; if, on the other hand, this particular citadel of Christian truth is given up, the inevitable consequence always is a complete retreat from the entire field of the supernatural, a giving up of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, and of the Resurrection of Christ, and generally, sooner or later, the reality of His vicarious Atonement, and certainly, His Deity. The importance of this subject is the reason why this is the longest chapter in our book.

#### MIRACLES DEFINED

Different New Testament scholars, and indeed different critics of the New Testament, rationalists, and modernists, will not be found to exactly agree on a definition of a miracle. This will necessitate our giving a number of definitions, proposed from time to time, and perhaps concluding with a simple one of our own. The Century Dictionary says that a miracle is: "an effect in nature not attributable to any of the recognized operations of nature, nor to the act of man, but indicative of superhuman power, and serving as a sign or witness thereof; a wonderful work, manifesting a power superior to the ordinary forces of nature."

Professor George P. Fisher, from whom we have just quoted, defines the word as follows: "A miracle is an event which the forces of nature, or secondary causes, operating under the ordinary divine preservation, are incompetent to produce. Secondary causes may be concerned in the production of a miracle. For a miracle (except in the case of creation) is wrought in nature, or in the realm of secondary causes; but these are insufficient to explain it. It is an

event which only the intervention of the first cause is adequate to produce."<sup>2</sup>

The German theologian, Julius Kaftan, defines a miracle as, "an extraordinary and unusual occurrence in nature, the historical relations of which its religious and moral import as derived from these, awaken in a special manner faith in God's living government of the world."<sup>3</sup>

Probably as good a definition as any is that given by one of the most distinguished Bampton lecturers, the late Professor C. A. Row, in which he speaks of a miracle as, "an occurrence which cannot be effectuated by the ordinary action of the known material forces of the universe, and could only have been brought about by the agency of intelligent volition; and which is preceded by an announcement on the part of the agent that it is about to happen or takes place directly on his bidding."<sup>4</sup>

Let us then say, because we are going to confine ourselves to the Gospel records, and it is only with miracles that appear therein that we are concerned in this chapter, that a miracle, such as those Jesus is supposed to have performed, is an event which never could have been the result of the working of laws of nature as we understand them, but is of such an extraordinary character that it requires for its cause the intervention of a supernatural being, i.e., an event which man himself cannot duplicate, and which cannot be accounted for by any naturalistic cause.

#### LIST OF THE GOSPEL MIRACLES

A number of different arrangements for classifying the Gospel miracles have been suggested, but we believe the following will prove both simple and adequate for our particular purpose.

I—NATURE MIRACLES: (1) the water turned into wine—John 2:1-11; (2) the first miraculous draft of fishes—Luke 5:1-7; (3) the stilling of the storm on the sea of



Galilee—Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:36-41; Luke 8:22-25; (4) walking on the sea—Matthew 14:22-32; Mark 6:45-46; John 6:15-21; (5) the finding of the tribute money in the mouth of the fish—Matthew 17:24-27; (6) the cursing of the fig tree—Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-24; (7) the second miraculous draft of fishes—John 21:1-11.

II—MIRACLES OF BODILY HEALINGS: (1) the healing of the nobleman's son at Capernaum—John 4:46-54; (2) Peter's wife's mother healed of a fever—Matthew 8:14-18; Mark 1:29-34; Luke 4:38-41; (3) the first cleansing of a leper—Matthew 8:1-4; Mark 1:40; Luke 5:12-14; (4) the healing of the paralytic man in Capernaum—Matthew 9:1-8; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:18-26; (5) the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda—John 5:1-16; (6) the man with the withered hand—Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11; (7) the healing of the palsied servant of the centurion—Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10; (8) the woman with the issue of blood—Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5:25-34; Luke 8:43-48; (9) the restoring of sight to two blind men—Matthew 9:27-31; (10) the healing of the deaf and dumb man—Matthew 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37; (11) the restoration of sight to the blind man outside Bethesda—Mark 8:22-26; (12) the cleansing of ten lepers—Luke 17:11-19; (13) the healing of the man born blind—John 9; (14) the woman with the spirit of infirmity—Luke 13:10-17; (15) the man afflicted with dropsy—Luke 14:1-6; (16) the healing of two blind men near Jericho—Matthew 20:29-34; Mark 10:46-52; (17) the restoration of a severed ear to Malchus—Luke 22:50 and 51.

III—THE HEALING OF THOSE POSSESSED BY DEMONS: There would seem to be five specific cases of the restoration of demon-possessed persons in the Gospel records, in addition to a great many others which are not specifically named but only generally referred to (e.g., Mark 1:32, 34, 39; Matt. 4:24; 8:16).

These are as follows: (1) The man with an unclean spirit

in the synagogue of Capernaum—Mark 1:23-28; Luke 4:33-37; (2) the man who was both blind and dumb—Matthew 12:22-30; Mark 3:22-30; Luke 11:14-23; (3) two possessed with demons at Gadara—Matthew 8:28-34; Mark 5:1-21; Luke 8:26-40; (4) a dumb man—Matthew 9:32-34; (5) the daughter of the Syrophenician woman—Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30; (6) the child, after the transfiguration—Matthew 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43.

IV—THE TWO MIRACLES INVOLVING THE MULTIPLICATION OF FOOD: These two much-debated miracles are, of course, (1) the feeding of the 5,000—incidentally, the only miracle recorded in all the four Gospels: Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:30-34; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14; (2) the feeding of the 4,000—Matthew 15:32-39; Mark 8:1-9.

V—THE THREE RAISINGS FROM THE DEAD: (1) the son of the widow of Nain—Luke 7:11-18; (2) the daughter of Jairus—Matthew 9:18, 19, 23-26; Mark 5:21-24, 35-43; Luke 8:40-42, 49-56; (3) Lazarus—John 11.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MIRACLES RECORDED IN THE GOSPELS

While the author of this book has read some thousands of pages dealing with the subject of the miracles of the New Testament, he must confess that he has never seen a classified list of the fundamental *characteristics* of these miracles which the Gospel records claim were performed by our Lord. In making this statement, he feels that he should also make what might be called a confession; namely, that he has not re-examined much of the *older* literature defending the veracity of the Gospel miracles. For example, he has not read, since a young man, the great work on Christian evidences by Paley. No doubt here, and in other books, the *characteristics* of the miracles are fully listed, but he has not found such a list in more recent



literature, and the one that follows, though it will be supported by a number of quotations, is his own.

### THEY ARE AN INSEPARABLE PART OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES

The narratives of Christ's miracles are inseparably a living part of the Gospel narratives. There is no standard of literary criticism which can ever make out a case that the Gospel miracles are late, unrelated, and artificial appendages to the otherwise normal narrative of natural events. As Professor T. H. Wright has said: "If excision be made from the evangelistic records (1) of all that directly narrates Christ's unique action as a healer and wonder-worker, (2) of all that presupposes the possibility and actuality of such unique action, (3) of all that testifies to His authority and power to do to a unique relation to God—the Gospels are left bald and bare and mutilated beyond description. The very warp and woof of the fabric is destroyed." <sup>5</sup>

Another point bearing on this very matter is clearly brought out by the late Professor C. A. Row, when he says that, "It is remarkable that the great majority of those against whom I am reasoning admit that the discourses in the Synoptic Gospels are fairly accurate repetitions of the actual utterances of Jesus, although they must have passed through a period of oral tradition. Yet it is certain that the accurate transmission of discourses by oral tradition is far more difficult than that of a report of facts through the same medium. The difficulty of preventing the intrusion of foreign elements is much greater. Slight alterations may materially affect their meaning. Yet the discourses recorded in the Synoptics bear the indelible impression of a single mind, that of Jesus Christ. It follows, therefore, that if the traditions of the Church were able to hand down accurately the discourses of our Lord until

the time when they were reduced to writing, still more easily would they transmit a correct account of His acts as narrated by His faithful followers." <sup>6</sup>

Anyone carefully reading the Gospels must be convinced of the justness of the verdict that "whatever else may be said, this must be admitted, that these evangelists designed to depict a supernatural life. That which they describe is in itself one great miracle; and if you attempt to eliminate the miraculous from it, you will find that all of it evaporates under your hands." <sup>7</sup>

#### THE RECORDS OF THE GOSPEL MIRACLES CONTAIN NOTHING UNREASONABLE OR SILLY

There were, it must be admitted, many stories current in the Greek and Roman world of our Lord's day, in the centuries immediately preceding His advent, and during the centuries immediately following, which are so fanciful, so ridiculous, so utterly unworthy of belief, that we do not even ask for the evidence supporting them, knowing full well that the incidents of which they speak could never have happened. Even in the third century of our era, many stories were told about the Lord Jesus which no man of our day would accept for one moment. I must say that, if I should read in the Gospels that Jesus called five sparrows before Him, and had each of them recite the Lord's prayer in a different language—one in Hebrew, one in Syriac, one in Greek, one in Latin, and one in Arabic, I would have a great deal of trouble in believing that such an event ever took place. Whether it were possible or not, if I should read in the Gospels that Jesus made a snail shell on the sea of Galilee to suddenly grow into the size of Mt. Tabor, and then as suddenly forced the shell back to its original form, I could not help but think that the whole thing was more or less silly and unnecessary. If I read in the Gospels that some babe became a full grown



man within five days after birth, I must confess I would have difficulty in believing it.

Referring to later literature concerning Christ, one reminds us that, e.g., "In the Gospels of Thomas and of the Infancy of our Saviour the child Jesus is represented as capricious, willful, and revengeful. Boys and men are struck dead at His word. Now He does good and kind deeds, now hurtful and malicious. Most of His wonders have no moral quality whatever, but are performed merely to show what He can do. He makes birds of clay with other boys, but at His command, His birds fly. He transforms boys into kids and then back again into boys. An expectant bridegroom had been changed into a mule by witchcraft; Jesus restored him to manhood."<sup>8</sup> There are many things in the Gospels which we cannot *account* for by natural causes, but there is not one single story in the Gospels the believing in which in any way violates the laws of our mind, or makes us feel ashamed or embarrassed that such stories are there!

While I am in a confessing mood, let me say that, from a young man, there has only been one passage in all the four Gospels over which I have stumbled, and that is the account of an angel troubling the water at the pool of Bethesda, resulting in the miraculous cure of any man who would first step down into these troubled waters, no matter what disease he might have (John 5:3b, 4). I am glad that the most ancient manuscripts omit *this particular part* of the miracle of the healing of the man who had lain there for thirty-eight years.

#### THE RESTRAINT OF THE RECORDS OF MIRACLES

There is a remarkable restraint characterizing all the narratives recording the miracles performed by our Lord, in severe contrast to miracle stories in extra-biblical literature. Let us take, e.g., the stilling of the storm on the

sea of Galilee, and the feeding of the five thousand. In Mark's account of the stilling of the storm (4:35-41), it is clearly indicated that Christ, in getting into the boat of the disciples, asked them to take Him over to the opposite side of the lake. If men were writing this story out of their own imaginations, with the sole purpose of magnifying the power of Jesus, would they not have said that Jesus, with a spoken word, lifted the boat to its final destination without effort or labor? Instead of that, it is clear from the narrative that the disciples were attempting to get the boat across the sea by their own skill, either by rowing, or by using sails, or by both. One could easily imagine a writer inserting in such a narrative, if it were only a piece of fiction, that Jesus suggested to the disciples that they should lie down in the bottom of the boat and rest for a while, while, by His omnipotence, He would easily take care of bringing the boat to the opposite shore. The very opposite is what we discover: Jesus leaves the disciples to work hard guiding the boat, whereas He Himself actually falls asleep. Has any great preacher taken for his text "He was . . . asleep on a pillow"?

In the feeding of the five thousand, if the story were purely a piece of fiction, it would have been very easy to have made out that Jesus fed this vast group of people by an absolute act of creation, i.e., by creating food out of nothing, or by turning stones into bread and fish. But this is not what we read. We find the Lord first asking the disciples how much food was available, and then taking these five loaves and two fishes, and, after offering thanks, breaking them, and giving to His disciples to distribute in this great company, until all did eat and were filled. Furthermore, if this story was a pure piece of fiction, no writer would ever have thought of Jesus commanding that the fragments of bread and fish be picked up and kept for later use. The point we are getting at is that there is a marvelous restraint pervading the records of our Lord's



miracles in the four Gospels, so utterly different from stories of so-called "miracle acts" on the part of great men who have been exalted to a semi-supernatural level by credulous followers of later ages.<sup>9</sup>

### THE GOSPEL MIRACLES DO NOT BECOME MORE FREQUENT AS TIME PASSES

The number of miracles recorded by the evangelists does not increase with the passing of time. It is commonly said that stories involving miraculous acts on the part of Jesus *gradually* arose in the Church, sometime after His death, with constantly increasing frequency, i.e., the further away the Christian community was in point of time from the three-year period of our Lord's active ministry, the more miraculous did they make out this three-year ministry to have been. Now the facts are just the opposite. Whatever be the exact order of the four Gospels, all critics agree that the Gospel of Mark is first in order of composition, and that the Gospel of John is last, Mark probably being written about the year 60 A.D. and John about the year 90 A.D.

Though devoting only twelve chapters to the entire history of our Lord, down to the Olivet discourse on Tuesday of Passion week, Mark's gospel contains eighteen miracles performed by Christ; whereas the Gospel of Matthew, certainly written later, in which the same period of public ministry occupies nearly seventeen chapters, contains only twenty miracles. The Gospel of Luke, written still later, gives merely twenty-one miracles; the Gospel of John, the last of all, gives only eight miracles. In other words, the first eleven chapters of the earliest Gospel, St. Mark's, record more miracles than are recorded in any other successive eleven chapters in any of the later Gospels. Clearly then, this particular aspect of our Lord's ministry is not the product of a late mythological accretion.

CHRIST'S MIRACLES WERE IN THE PHYSICAL REALM AND  
COULD BE APPRAISED BY THE PHYSICAL SENSES

We speak of the *miracle* of regeneration, and no doubt we speak correctly, but you cannot, in a truly *scientific* way, determine the difference between a regenerate and an unregenerate man, i.e., you cannot measure by *eye*, or by *ear*, or by *touch*, the changes that have taken place in the character and spirit of such a man. But the miracles of Christ, as the phrase is universally understood, were not miracles which took place fundamentally in the *characters* of men, or the inner secret places of their lives, in their hearts, or minds, but were actually performed in what we call the *physical* world, and could be ascertained by the eyes of men. How much today is determined, even in the field of science, by what men see with their own eyes! Almost everything in astronomy today depends ultimately on what a man sees with his eye, aside from photographs automatically taken at great telescopes, and even here the ultimate conclusions must rest upon what men's eyes see on these photographic plates. A surgeon operates because of what he reads from an x-ray picture. Test-tubes are watched day and night by the eyes of trained experimenters, and what they see with their eyes in these test-tubes they record as scientific data. Practically all the great scientific laboratories of the world reach their major conclusions by what ultimately is seen by the eyes of scientists who are working within their fascinating precincts.

Now the eye of a trained scientist today is fundamentally no different than the eye of a Galilean fisherman; though the scientist has seen much more than Galilean fishermen ever saw, yet the fisherman on the sea of Galilee knows the difference between a storm which is about to sink a boat, and a sea of quiet calm, as well as any scientist living. There may be different forms of leprosy which only a skilled pathologist can distinguish, but a native of



Palestine could see as quickly as a trained surgeon, when the hand of a man shriveled and diseased with leprosy, was restored and made whole again. These things are *seen*. It does not take a specialist in optometry at Johns Hopkins to know if a man is stone blind or not, and a person who cannot even read or write would know if a young man in his neighborhood, born blind, was suddenly one day enabled to see. One does not have to be a dietician, or mathematician, to know on the one hand that five loaves and two fishes can never feed five thousand people, and to know, on the other hand, when five thousand people have been fed with five loaves and two fishes, that these loaves and fishes have been miraculously multiplied. The point we are making here is that the miracles Jesus performed were in the physical realm, and their reality could be determined accurately, with the naked eye, by the peasants, and fishermen, and disciples, and scribes among whom Christ labored.<sup>10</sup>

#### CHRIST'S MIRACLES, NOT DONE SECRETLY, BUT PUBLICLY IN THE PRESENCE OF MANY WITNESSES

Four years ago this last summer, the wife of the author of this book and the author himself, were spending two weeks in a well-known hotel far up in the Catskills, conducted for the last forty years by a famous Quaker family of the East. One evening, to entertain the guests, a magician was brought up from New York City. The morning after his evening performance, I asked him if he had noticed in the *Illustrated London News* of the preceding spring, the account of a remarkable act performed by a Hindu fakir, assisted by a boy, wherein this boy was supposed to be thrown into a state of suspended animation, and, in such a state, to be stretched out in the air in a horizontal position with only his finger tips touching the top of a short pole. If you think this is easy, you try it.

Yes, said the man from New York to me, he had seen it, but what he wanted to know was had I seen the later account of this same trick, in this famous illustrated paper, acknowledging that the photographer had been deceived, and exposing the whole fraud. I told him I had not seen it. Well, this is how it was done. The older man of the traveling duet first drove a short rod into the ground, and then standing near to the rod, with the boy, he threw over both of them a great sheet. After working for some time under the sheet, hidden of course from the gazing eyes of the public, he threw the sheet back, and there was the boy, apparently unconscious, horizontally stretched out in the air, with his finger tips on the upper end of this rod. There were no wires visible, and there was no second rod holding up the boy's feet. The trick was this: while they were under the great sheet the end of a long thin iron rod was firmly attached to the upper end of this perpendicular rod, at right angles. The boy wound his arms and legs around this horizontal rod, and was then wrapped in a sheet, except for his head and extended fingers. When the great covering sheet was thrown off, the boy *seemed* to be suspended horizontally from the perpendicular rod, whereas in reality he was quietly resting his body on the horizontal rod, a rod never seen or suspected by the onlookers.<sup>11</sup> This could never have been accomplished except it was done under cover.

Jesus never performed a miracle unless there were witnesses present, as far as we know. Take, e.g., the miracles recorded in the eighth and ninth chapters of Matthew. In the healing of a leper, we read that "a great multitude" was following Him; in the healing of the centurion servant, He did not even go to where the servant was dying. In the house of Simon Peter, at least Simon and his wife were there, for when his wife's mother was raised from her bed, "she arose and ministered unto *them*." In the stilling of the waves on the sea of Galilee, Christ was with His dis-



ciples. Other people are not mentioned as being present in the healing of the demon-possessed man at Gadara, but they are mentioned in the healing of other demon-possessed characters in the Gospels. A great crowd of people had gathered around the Lord Jesus when the woman with the issue of blood was healed. When Jesus came into the ruler's house where the daughter had died, we are told, in the account in Mark's Gospel, that He took "the father and mother and them that were with Him and entered in where the damsel was lying." The two blind men who followed Him were not healed until Jesus actually came into the home of some friend. The dumb man possessed with a demon was healed immediately after he was brought by friends to Jesus. In other words, Christ did not go up into a mountain, perform a miracle upon some individual without any other person being present, and then come down and declare to a credulous multitude what He had done. *His works were accomplished before the eyes of multitudes of people.* It is an interesting point, but we will not enlarge upon it here, that none of the miracles that Christ ever performed were actually denied! Men could say that He was performing these works by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons, and they did say so, but that the miracles were actually performed, no one seems to have dared to deny.

#### CHRIST'S MIRACLES NOT DUPLICATED BY MODERN SCIENCE

The miracles which Jesus performed are not being duplicated today by modern science. This may seem astonishing to some, who have always believed otherwise, but a few moments' careful consideration of the evidence, will, I believe, fully support this assertion. Modern science is doing marvelous things, but modern science is not doing what Jesus did; furthermore, what modern science is doing, Jesus did not do. Let us take the last statement first.

Modern science has given us a vehicle of communication called an automobile, run without man power or horse power, which can be driven sixty, eighty, ninety, or two hundred miles per hour, over prepared highways. We never read that Jesus stepped into a chariot, asked that the animals drawing it should be withdrawn, and then, to the amazement of all, by a power unknown to the surrounding multitude, impel the chariot down a Roman road at forty miles an hour. If Jesus had done that, we could say that Henry Ford had duplicated such a miracle in the twentieth century. But Jesus did not do that. If some night, seated around a fire in the hills of Judaea, our Lord had said to the disciples that He knew of a way in which the air could be controlled, so that a debate in the Roman forum could be heard in Judaea, and made it possible for the disciples to hear such a debate in that very hour, we could say that the modern radio was now doing what Jesus then did in a so-called miraculous way. But Jesus did not do that.

On the other hand, what our Lord did do, modern science is not doing. Two years ago, the author himself came home from Europe on the magnificent ocean liner, the *Bremen*. The boat was really a palace. It was far more sumptuous than any home we have ever lived in (though I prefer home). Here was an excellent library, five orchestral programs every day, offered by an orchestra of forty pieces, beds more comfortable than those found in our very best hotels, the most delicious food of the greatest variety set before one three times a day, a brief resumé of the world's news of the day before placed before one at the breakfast table each morning (which is more than one could have on the plains of Arizona), a swimming pool as large as those found in most Y.M.C.A.'s, etc., etc. The boat had everything. No, I am wrong. The boat had every necessary device but one, and there came a time when *that* was what we wanted most, namely, a device for keeping the boat steady when the waves ran high, or else a device for subduing the



waves lest the boat should be severely rocked. When a storm came up, the Captain did not go up on the deck and tell the waves to be quiet, for one reason—he knew better. With all of our modern science, no man in the world can do with the wild waves of a storm at sea what Jesus did when the disciples thought they were about to sink, as an unexpected storm struck them sailing on the sea of Galilee—instantly subdue them with a word.

Men born stone blind are not given back their eyesight today, though doctors are doing wonderful things with the eyes. Most of all, we are not raising the dead today. Death today is the same as it was in our Lord's day. Having been a pastor for twenty years, I know something of sickness, of hospitals, of doctors, of medicine, of remarkable recoveries, and of the tragedy of decease, and I know well enough that when a doctor at a bedside rises and says, "I am sorry, but he has gone," that is all that needs to be said. Death is death. I have never seen a surgeon, nor a leader of any religious cult, nor a pathologist, nor an electrician, nor anybody else, ever come into a room where a corpse was lying, and bring that one back to life again. Our Lord *could* do it, according to the Gospel records. The point I am making here is, and it should be a point continually insisted upon, that the miracles which Christ performed are not being duplicated in our modern scientific age, and men are not expecting to duplicate them.<sup>12</sup>

#### THE RESULTS OF CHRIST'S EFFORTS IN WORKING MIRACLES WERE ACHIEVED INSTANTLY

We place this point here because, possibly, in thinking of the last point we have made, that modern science is not duplicating the miracles of our Lord, someone might say, "Well, what about the raising of Simon Peter's wife's mother who was sick of a fever?—certainly doctors are doing that every day." This is true only in part. Millions

of people sick of a fever do get up, and go back to work, but *they do not get up the moment the fever breaks*. That is the very thing they are not to do. When a person has been ill with a fever, even for two or three days, and the fever finally breaks, that person is too weak to walk across the room, and, as for going to work the same day, it is just an impossibility. In the account of the raising of Simon Peter's wife's mother from her bed of illness, weak with fever, we read that she "*immediately* ministered unto them," i.e., she began to prepare a meal, and served it to those who were in the home (Mark 1:29-31). So, it is still a miracle! It would be thought so in our day, as it was then.

#### CHRIST IN PERFORMING MIRACLES ALWAYS HAD A HIGH AND WORTHY OBJECTIVE

At times, the miracles that Christ accomplished have been compared to the acts of a magician, or some noted wizard, who was creating or had created a great sensation by certain feats which men were unable to explain. Among other differences, there is this great one between the miracles of Christ and the feats of those who set out to astonish a public audience. Magicians are always interested in two things, primarily, in winning the adoration of an astonished crowd, and in obtaining from the crowd offerings of money. Our Lord did not go about the country performing miracles simply to amaze a multitude. And He certainly did not go around the country performing miracles to obtain a living. We cannot conceive of the Lord Jesus ever allowing anyone to give Him money for the things which He accomplished. Christ's miracles had two fundamental objectives: first, that of helping broken, diseased, enslaved, handicapped men and women to obtain soundness of health again, freedom from demon-enslavement, hearing, sight, the ability to walk, etc., etc.; secondly,



to glorify God in such a way that men would recognize that the One performing these miracles was indeed one sent by and approved by God. We readily grant that the cursing of the fig tree was an exception to the general law, but that does not in any way contradict our statement which emphatically applies to the other thirty-four miracles. Our Lord is One characterized as going about "doing good" (Acts 10:38), and this is manifested nowhere more plainly than in His ministry of miracles. What a difference, say, between turning stones into rubies, and then turning the rubies back into stones again, which our Lord never did, and, taking five loaves and two fishes, and, by their miraculous multiplication, feeding five thousand hungry people. The one would be simply a manifestation of miraculous power, without any moral objective at all, the other an act of mercy, and grace, and compassion, to meet the physical needs of a great group of people who had come out unprepared to stay through the day to hear the Lord speak.

"In harmony with Christ's absolute unselfishness, He is never represented as having worked a single miracle on His own behalf. He will turn water into wine, that nothing may mar the gladness of a marriage feast (John 2: 1-11); He will provide an ample meal for the multitudes who all day long have been listening to His wonderful teaching (Mark 6:34-43); but He will not convert the stones of the wilderness into bread to satisfy His own hunger (Matthew 4:1-4), or cause water to gush out of a rock to slake His thirst. Instead of that, He asks of a Samaritan woman to let down her bucket into the well to give Him to drink (John 4:7); and, when dying on the Cross, depends on the compassion felt for Him by one of the bystanders for the sponge full of vinegar which is lifted to His lips (Mark 15:36). And it is the same from the beginning to the end of His earthly career. There is no exception to the rule."<sup>13</sup>

OUR LORD HIMSELF PUT GREAT EMPHASIS  
UPON HIS MIRACLES

It has been said by some that the Gospel records of our Lord's miracles are only the late verdict regarding Christ's acts rendered by adoring disciples, years after Christ had gone to glory, and that they gave to these miracles a significance far beyond anything attributed to them by the Lord Jesus Himself. A careful examination of our Lord's own words will reveal that such a statement is an unsupported theory, decidedly contradicted by the facts of the case. When the disciples of John the Baptist came to Christ asking whether He were the true Messiah or not, He replied, "Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached" (Luke 7:22). To prove to the unbelieving Jews that He had the right to forgive sins, "He said to the sick of the palsy 'Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.' And he arose, and departed to his house" (Matthew 9:6, 7). In John's record of our Lord's ministry, we find Christ Himself saying, "The works which the Father hath given me to accomplish, the very works that I do, bare witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (5:36). "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bare witness of me" (10:25). He speaks of His works as those "which none other man did" (15:24). And what of our Lord's severe condemnation of the unbelieving cities of Palestine? "Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have



been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day" (Matthew 11:21-23).<sup>14</sup>

### THEORIES PROPOSED TO ACCOUNT FOR THESE MIRACULOUS ACTS RATIONALISTICALLY

#### THE FRAUD THEORY

In earlier periods of skeptical criticism of the Gospel records, a great deal was heard about what we might call the fraud theory, to explain the miracles that we find in the narratives of our Lord's life. This theory was first most powerfully set forth by the German scholar, Reimarus (1694-1768), who went so far as to say that "the Lord and His disciples were nothing but a band of tricksters—that Jesus became involved in a Messianic deception, and that to maintain His position as a Messiah, He had to pretend that He had power to work such miracles as are recorded in the Gospels, and dared even to suggest that Jesus actually arranged with certain persons that they should pretend to be blind, lame, deaf, dumb, insane, or dead that He might have the credit of healing them or raising them from the dead."<sup>15</sup>

Woolston, one of the outstanding deists of the early nineteenth century, in publishing his famous *Discourses on Miracles* (1727-1729), advocated the same theory, and suggested in the matter of our Lord's Resurrection, that "the body of Christ was privately slipped away the day before He was supposed to have arisen from the dead, that the guards were bribed or intoxicated, that Pilate acquiesced in this deceit and that Christ's Resurrection was declared by His disciples who knew they were lying."<sup>16</sup>

Today no one, as far as the author is aware, even among the most advanced rationalists, dares to bring disrepute and scorn upon himself by advocating such an impossible theory to explain the miracle narratives. It need not concern us further.

## THE MYTHICAL THEORY

Some of the most distinguished rationalistic critics of the New Testament have, in considering Christ's miracles, put forth the theory that because there always rose up around the figure of popular heroes, stories of wonderful feats, etc., "the history of Jesus was singularly liable to the influence of this myth-forming propensity. . . . This weaving of a garland for the popular hero (so they claim) was not the work of premeditating deceit or of cunning invention; it was the inevitable growth of the feeling of the community." I think the concise words of Professor Marcus Dods, which were written immediately after Dr. Pfleiderer had delivered his brilliant but antisupernaturalistic Gifford Lectures in 1894, are more than a sufficient exposure of this particular theory which has seemingly fascinated so many people.

"First, It proceeds upon the idea that the Messiah was expected to be a worker of miracles, and therefore after the death of Jesus miracles were freely ascribed to Him. But if during His life Jesus had wrought no miracles, how did He come to be acknowledged as the Messiah by persons who looked for a miracle-working Messiah? How was it possible that men who were so persuaded the Messiah would work miracles that they invented them for Him, should recognize as the Messiah a person who wrought none? If without miracles the first step could be taken, and they could be induced to believe in Him as the Messiah, why could not the easier subsequent steps be taken without the ascription of miracles? Something originated the idea that He was a supernatural person, what was it?

"Second, It is not denied that Jesus Himself claimed to work miracles. This admission seems to me fatal to the theory. To say that He was compelled to work miracles against His inclination, is nothing to the point. To say that He professed to work miracles, but did not, is inadmissible. Whether a supernatural person or not, He was sane and He was honest. But to admit that He claimed to work miracles, and to maintain that He could not and



did not, is to reduce the purest, truest Being we know to the level of the common charlatan. His own claim seems to me to settle the question.

"The third difficulty which prevents our acceptance of this theory is that, admittedly, the formation of myths requires some time. If it can be shown that the Gospels faithfully embody the primitive tradition, the observation and conviction of eye-witnesses, and that they are not the reflection of the thoughts and fancies of the second generation, then this theory falls to the ground."<sup>17</sup>

We have already seen in the first chapter of this book that all the evidence concerning the origin of our Gospels prohibits the elapse of a long time, required for the development of myths between the death of our Lord and the earliest accounts of His earthly ministry.

#### THE THEORY THAT CHRIST'S MIRACLES WERE DUE TO NATURAL CAUSES WHICH WERE HIDDEN FROM THE DISCIPLES

In the early part of the nineteenth century, the German scholar, Paulus (1761-1851), put forward the theory, which had been proposed by others before him, but not with the same vigor, nor resulting in such influence, that really nothing miraculous had actually happened in the public ministry of our Lord, but that the disciples honestly believed certain events were to be interpreted as miracles, because they were not able to account for them by natural law. In the words of Bishop Headlam, Paulus declared that "miracles of healing were worked by the influence of spiritual power on the nervous system, or by medicine and other secret remedies which our Lord was acquainted with, and others did not know. When the twelve were sent forth, they healed the sick by the use of oil, a well known remedy. Demoniacs were dealt with by sedatives. The stilling of the waves arose from the fact that just at that moment the boat came under

the shelter of a hill. . . . The raisings from the dead were deliverances from premature burial. The explanation of the Resurrection was that our Lord was not really dead."<sup>18</sup>

While it seems exceedingly gross, as we attempt in one short paragraph to state in simple language what such rationalists actually said about the miracles of our Lord, yet we must admit that this is exactly what many modernists are writing and saying today. As an illustration of how such radical theories as these, *seemingly* so utterly inconceivable and impossible of acceptance, filter into our contemporary literature, we place before our readers the following explanation of the miracle of the quieting of the storm on the sea of Galilee, as it appears in Bruce Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows*. In attempting to explain what happened on this occasion, Bruce Barton writes,

"He stepped into a sailboat with his disciples late one afternoon, and, being very tired, lay down in the stern and was almost immediately asleep. The clouds grew thicker and the surface of the lake which had been quiet a few minutes before, was broken into sudden waves. The little boat dived and tossed, and still he slept. His disciples had grown up on the shores of that lake; they were fishermen, accustomed to its moods and not easily frightened. But they had never been out in such a storm as this. It grew fiercer; water began to come in over the side, every moment seemed to threaten destruction. At last they could stand the strain no longer; they went to the stern and woke him.

"He rose without the slightest suggestion of hurry or alarm. A quick glance was enough to give him a full understanding of the situation. He issued a few quiet orders and presently the menaced boat swung round into the smoother waters of safety. Call it a miracle or not—the fact remains that it is one of the finest examples of self-control in all human history. Napoleon said that he had met few men with courage of the 'two o'clock in the morning variety.' Many men can be brave in the warmth of the sun and amid the heartening plaudits of the crowd; but to be wakened suddenly out of sound sleep, and then to exhibit instant mastery—that is a type of courage which is rare indeed."<sup>19</sup>



All we would say regarding this is that the disciples in the boat with our Lord that day were themselves afraid of sinking, and if there had been any quiet stretch of water nearby, they would have surely seen it, and guided the boat in that direction, without thinking it necessary to awaken the Lord. What is more, and anyone ought to know this, whether they have been to sea or not, when a terrific storm strikes a small body of water, such as the sea of Galilee, one cannot see from a boat surrounded by high waves any quiet spot of water nearby. The whole thing is nonsensical. Whether one chooses to believe in miracles or not, certainly no modern man in these skeptical days would be so foolish as to think that this crazy theory would explain what the New Testament records.

In regard to the whole idea that the miracles of Christ were due to secondary causes hidden from the disciples, we would suggest a re-reading of the paragraph appearing in an earlier part of this chapter, in which the point is made that modern science is not able to duplicate what the Lord Jesus did while He was here on earth. Let us grant for a moment that there were secondary causes, say, in the miracle of stilling the waves, which the disciples knew nothing about, making the event to *appear* as a miracle. Today, when we pride ourselves in having such marvelous control over nature, why is it that no sea captain now attempts to quiet a stormy sea by saying a word? If there were secondary causes that brought about such an amazing change in these stormy waters, why do not men at sea have *similar* experiences today, because of the same secondary causes? If Jesus could call forth a man from the grave four days after he had died, and this was due to *secondary* causes, why can't we use the same secondary causes today, and call forth men from the grave? The whole thing is preposterous! When a man says that he believes such a theory as this is adequate for explaining the miracles, he is not bringing to the Gospel text before him an open mind and a real desire

to discover the truth. Even if to some who are reading this book, miracles seem impossible, surely you cannot quiet your mind with such theories as these!

### THE THEORY THAT THE MIRACLES OF HEALING WERE DUE TO AUTO-SUGGESTION

Some have said, and this seems to be a very popular theory just now, that in the cases where men and women and children in the Gospels were suddenly and wonderfully healed by our Lord, such results were brought about by the power of Christ's mind acting upon the mind, and, ultimately, the body, of those diseased, a sort of psycho-therapeutic idea. But as Professor Box has well pointed out, "It is the clear verdict of medical science that suggestion is incapable of removing any organic malady whatever, that its curative effects are restricted to functional disorders. Only what has come into existence through an idea can be removed by an idea." <sup>20</sup>

The late Dr. Illingworth, in his very valuable work on this subject, rightly insists that, "after all, such a hypothesis as this involves the rejection of all those more striking works of healing which are obviously beyond the scope of anything in the nature of personal influence. Indeed, the more startling and exceptional instances of healing are quite as remarkable as anything else in the history; . . . they must either have occurred or not; and the evidence says that they were seen to occur and become potent factors in spreading the fame of Christ." <sup>21</sup>

A true paralytic today is not made to walk by the exercise of the mind of another upon the mind of the one so diseased. There may be different forms of medical treatment which can help cases such as this. Long days spent in the sun may alleviate some suffering, manipulation, of various forms, may adjust some bones and bring relief to nerve centers, but this is not the way our Lord worked. His healings were



not the result of long processes of sun bathing, nor the result of extensive medical treatment, nor were they the result of an osteopath working over the patient. His healings were instantaneous, and there is not a doctor in all the world today, with all of our modern advance of science, who can make a man who has been lame from his mother's womb to take up his bed and walk, with the mere uttering of a declarative sentence, as Christ did. As for opening the eyes of those born blind, by auto-suggestion, it hardly need be mentioned, for everyone acknowledges that these things are not being done today. Finally, if such wonderful healings were really accomplished by our Lord because of His tremendous personality, then why have not some other people of great magnetism been able to repeat our Lord's healings through the ages that have followed? If Christ is unique in this, that He had a personality more magnetic than that of any other person who ever lived, then this is a most astonishing fact in itself, and needs explanation.

THE ATTEMPT TO EXPLAIN THE MIRACLES OF CHRIST  
BY MAKING OUT HIS AGE TO HAVE BEEN  
ONE OF EXTREME CREDULITY

During the last five or six decades of intense historical research, resulting in, for the most part, a much richer knowledge and a more thorough understanding of the ancient world, some scholars, who cannot believe, and will not believe, so they admit, that any miracles ever took place in our Lord's ministry, have suggested that the first century of our era in which Jesus lived and worked was an age of extreme credulity, a time when all people believed in and looked for supernatural manifestations. They insist that the disciples of our Lord, together with great multitudes who are said to have been astonished at our Lord's miracles, were only the pitiful subjects of this mist of credulity which rested upon the whole known world at that time. This is the

way Harnack attempts to explain away the miracles of the Gospels, declaring that, "the Gospels came from a time in which the marvelous may be said to have been something of almost daily occurrence. People felt and saw that they were surrounded by wonders, and not by any means only in the religious sphere." <sup>22</sup>

This is the idea put forth by Professor Ernest F. Scott, of Union Theological Seminary, in a recent book, that, for the most part, is quite commendable. Professor Scott devotes almost all of his volume to prove that the Gospel records are historically trustworthy, and then, coming face to face with the miracles, which he does not accept, he proposes this very idea which Harnack sets forth. These are the words of Professor Scott: "It must always be remembered that the ancient mind worked on assumptions which have become untenable. The higher world was conceived in realistic fashion, and many things were construed as miracle which we should now explain by natural causes. Looking back on the life of Jesus, under the full conviction that He was the Messiah, the disciples would see all His action in a supernatural light, and their testimony given in perfect faith, would be received without any of the doubting criticism which it now awakens." <sup>23</sup>

This particular theory has been worked out by Professor Shirley Jackson Case, of the University of Chicago, and practically fills an entire volume which he published in 1929. Let us examine the theory with some care. In the first place, as we have observed in the second chapter of this volume, the century in which Christ lived was not an age of what might be called extreme credulity, any more than the age of our grandfathers was one of extreme credulity. This age was, actually, a time of genuine skepticism. All one has to do is read the writings of no less a person than Cicero to know how skeptical the age was. It is true that they held some peculiar beliefs. It is true that many of them were deceived. It is true that gods were worshipped who had no



existence. But in what age have not false gods been worshipped? In what age have not superstitions been accepted by the common multitude? In what age has not false rumor often taken the place of truth? In what age have not multitudes of people followed charlatans and tricksters? We talk about our modern critical, sophisticated, intellectual age, but in this very day, more periodicals are on our newsstands devoted to the absolutely unscientific nonsense of astrology than could ever have been imagined, say, fifty years ago. This is the age in which millions of people have given money to false mediums, in an attempt to speak with the dead. You cannot label any one age as a time of great credulity. One certainly would not speak of the citizens of Athens and Rome as especially stupid and deluded people, and our New Testament seems well acquainted with the convictions and the ideas that were prevalent in Greece and Rome at that day.

Furthermore, many of the people in the New Testament did not believe in these miracles of which we are speaking. Thomas himself would not believe in the Resurrection of Christ, until he actually saw the risen body of our Lord. Is it not this to what our Lord refers, when He speaks about the mighty works which had been done at Capernaum and at Bethsaida, and yet these cities had not repented (Matthew 11:21-23)? The extreme skepticism of those who lived in our Lord's day is exactly what Christ is emphasizing when He asks, "Why do ye not believe?" (John 8:46). The whole of the New Testament manifests an era of skepticism.

If these events we call miracles were not miracles, but were only thought to be such by a superstitious people, living in an extremely superstitious age, then what were they? If the raging sea of Galilee was not quieted in an instant by a word of Christ, then what happened? If Lazarus did not come forth from the grave four days after he died, what happened? If the eyes of the blind were not opened by a touch of Jesus' fingers, what happened? If the paralytic did

not rise and walk home, carrying his bed, after being an invalid from the day of his birth, what happened?

Finally, is it reasonable to believe that the books, namely the four Gospels, which are recognized everywhere as being together the most influential documents ever penned, changing the whole Roman world, transforming and comforting millions of people in every age, presenting the most exquisitely beautiful picture of a holy character, and the most marvelous discourses that ever proceeded from the lips of any one person in all history, is it reasonable that these documents, which have engaged the serious attention of some of the profoundest students of every age, not only theologians, but scientists, philosophers, historians, and men of literature, should be written by four men who were easy dupes, whose minds were so childish and undeveloped that they would count as supernatural those acts which, by a normally educated person, such as all of us are supposed to be today, would be considered only astonishing feats performed by a remarkable person? Is it reasonable to believe that such a one as the Apostle John should give us a Gospel so profound that, after nearly nineteen hundred years of study of its pages, men recognize that they have not yet brought out of it all the treasures that are therein contained—is it reasonable to believe that a person capable of writing a book like this, lifting our minds up to the very gates of heaven, and interpreting our Lord's life on earth in such a magnificent and universal way, should not have been wise enough to discern the naturalness of his Lord's acts?

I think, perhaps, here belongs one more statement, though I do not want to press it, because many will think I may be unfair in even suggesting it as an argument, yet everyone will recognize it to be true, namely, that there have been great thinkers, great scholars, men of brilliant intellect, men who have devoted all their lives to careful historical research, men of scientific fame, men whose books have tre-



mendously influenced their age, men who have been pioneers of thought, there have been great numbers of such men who have firmly believed that the deeds of our Lord about which we are speaking must be counted as nothing less than manifestations of the supernatural.

Perhaps just here, while we are speaking of outstanding scholars who believe in Christ's miracles, we will do well to bring to the attention of our readers a remarkable confession of belief in the miracles by one of the outstanding physicists of the last half century, Sir John Ambrose Fleming, who for over thirty years was the Professor of Electrical Engineering in University College, London, and has been prominent throughout his life in researches pertaining to the development of electric lighting, wireless telegraphy, and telephony. It was he who, in 1904, made the first form of thermionic valve so important in wireless. A sketch of his life occupies three-quarters of a column in the latest edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In 1928, at the age of seventy-nine, with a half century of scientific achievements behind him, in an address given to the London Inter-Faculty Christian Union on "The Foundations of the Christian Faith," this distinguished physicist made the following clear statement concerning his own belief in miracles. "The span of 40 years or so which elapsed between the earthly ministry of Christ and the placing on record of the facts of his life in the earliest written gospels is easily within the memory of a single life, and it is therefore absolutely impossible that legends of miracles which never happened could have obtained widespread acceptance. Moreover, we have to deal with the consequences of them as events. The apostles and early disciples did not convey to the surrounding countries simply the news of a new or more exalted morality. They put themselves forward as true witnesses, and in many cases as eyewitnesses, of the most remarkable events in the history of the world, namely, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His Ascension to

heaven. If His earthly life was concluded with those supernatural events, then it renders all records of the exhibition of supernatural power by Him during His life antecedently probable or even certain. In view of all the facts, there are no longer grounds for rejecting the miraculous events recorded in the New Testament as legend or myth. They are undoubtedly true statements of events which have happened, but which are quite out of line with the normal phenomena of Nature and the ordinary experience of human life." (From his pamphlet, "The Foundations of the Christian Faith," page 8.)

#### THE SO-CALLED "SPIRITUAL" THEORY FOR INTERPRETING THE MIRACLES

Many modernists who, seemingly, have too much reverence for the New Testament, and especially for the Gospels, to allow themselves to speak of the miracle stories as the result of deliberate fraud, or originating from myths, adopt the idea that these particular episodes in our Lord's life are not to be emphasized in their historical details, but are to be used by us for the teaching of what they call "spiritual" truths. We have already seen something like this idea in Mr. Bruce Barton's fanciful reconstruction of the stilling of the storm on the sea of Galilee. As good an illustration as any of what we mean is Professor James Moffatt's interpretation of the feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14:15-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). Professor Moffatt's name appears so frequently in literature pertaining to the New Testament, and carries so much weight with many people throughout the English world, who are not at times aware of his real convictions regarding such things as Christ's miracles, that we are here taking the liberty of quoting his entire discussion of this miracle that our readers may be able to see for themselves exactly how he destroys the miraculous aspect of this entire event.



"The tale is told simply and told as a miracle. Why not take it as such? But, even without assuming that Jesus had no more than ordinary powers over nature, we may raise the question whether such anecdote cannot be explained along simpler lines. . . . It is natural to ask whether contemporary folklore does not offer any parallels to this story. There is a miraculous tale of the kind about the Jewish rabbi Chanina ben Dosa, who lived about A.D. 70, and Buddhistic literature contains a legend about the Buddha feeding five thousand men from a poor woman's little store, till they were satisfied and left some provisions over. But both tales are much later than the gospels, the Jewish being attributed to the authority of a rabbi late in the third century, and the Buddhistic being later still. Neither, not even the Buddhistic, necessarily reflects the gospel story. Both belong to the naive soil of stories like those about Elijah or Elisha, which indeed they resemble. Their origin is probably due, not to any influence of the Christian nor even of the Hebrew tale, but to the operation of similar beliefs about holy men. . . . The historical method can, therefore, offer only two lines of suggestion for the origin and meaning of the story. (2) The tale arose out of the Jewish belief that messiah was expected to feed the people with bread from heaven. Once Jesus was believed to be messiah, it would be natural to tell such a story about him, especially if it was meant at the same time to illustrate the primitive love-feast or eucharist. On this view, the tale is allegorical; it is a symbolical representation of an early Christian idea and practice, one of the instances in the gospel tradition which indicate the transference of poetic tradition into prose statement. Jesus the messiah feeds his people with supernatural supplies in the wilderness, holds a eucharistic feast with them, which means fellowship and social sympathy, or originates the love-feast, which implies that all share their food in a generous and orderly fashion.

"This is certainly the idea in the mind of the fourth evangelist (John vi. 1-14), who uses the story to introduce a dialogue upon the true bread or manna from heaven—his equivalent for the eucharist. But it is not easy to detect the symbolism in the synoptic tradition. The love-feast or eucharist was commonly celebrated indoors, and actions like the blessing, the breaking of the bread, and the sharing of food, were characteristic of Jewish

meals in general. The story may be aetiological, but the indications of this are not self-evident.

"Those who are dissatisfied with such an explanation may argue that the story is like that of the cursing of the fig tree, a parable or comparison which has been turned into a tale; Jesus compared his teaching to food which satisfied all, however numerous they might be, and which increased instead of diminishing when it was freely imparted by himself and his disciples. This teaching was intended to illustrate the mission from which the disciples had just returned. He bade them never hesitate to communicate what they knew of him to others. If they imparted his truth in faith, they would be able, thanks to his provision, to supply the needs of all and sundry.

"Such explanations of the genesis of the story do not require to assume any basis of fact whatever, or, at the most, a bare incident, which was afterwards elaborated into a symbol. The second line of interpretation holds more closely to the ground of fact. It assumes (*b*) that the story has grown out of an incident which really occurred. Jesus once set the example of sharing his scanty food with a number of hungry hearers, and the disciples were encouraged to do the same, till it was found that there was actually enough and more than enough for all. The tale grew in oral tradition; its form was influenced by the Old Testament story of Elisha, and naturally the numbers were exaggerated."<sup>24</sup>

In regard to such a theory as this, we should first remember that most of the people on earth for the last eighteen hundred years have never heard of the Jewish rabbi Chanina ben Dosa. The difference between him and the One whose miraculous works we are considering, is that he had a local influence in the last half of the first century, and practically no influence since, whereas the Lord Jesus has exercised a greater influence over the civilization of the last nineteen hundred years than any other person who ever lived. The stories of the works of the Jewish rabbi are buried in a literature which admittedly contains much unbelievable and mythological material; whereas the stories of the feeding of the five thousand are a part of a literature



which scholars of every age have been convinced were historically trustworthy in every way. The rabbi died and his body is somewhere as dust in Palestine today; the One we are talking about rose again from the dead and now sitteth at the right hand of God.

Furthermore, we are forced to ask the question, If this miracle did not actually take place, what was it that occurred? Even Professor William Sanday in his latter days, when he had come to repudiate the nature miracles, confessed, "I quite agree that the evidence for this miracle is peculiarly strong." How could a *natural* event ever be raised by Matthew and John, who must have been there, to such a stupendous, *miraculous* event as their narratives clearly indicate? Language is language, and certain words express certain ideas. These writers emphatically give the impression that it was a distinct and remarkable miracle. They knew they were giving this impression. If the miracle did not take place, these writers of the Holy Gospels deliberately undertook to deceive the Christian Church. We do not believe they were guilty of such a deception.

#### HUME'S FAMOUS ARGUMENT AGAINST MIRACLES

It was in 1748 that the philosopher, David Hume, issued his epochal philosophical *Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, in which appeared his famous "Essay on Miracles," which, though running to scarcely thirty printed pages, soon took its place as the most powerful argument ever raised against belief in the miracles of Christ, and, for that matter, in all miracles. David Strauss went so far as to say that this essay carried "with it such general conviction, that the question may be regarded as having been by it virtually settled."<sup>25</sup> Professor John Herman Randall, Jr., has recently said that, "since Hume's critique of miracles in the eighteenth century, religious liberals have refused to believe in any such interferences with the order of natural law."<sup>26</sup>

It will be necessary for us, because of the tremendous influence of Hume's attack upon miracles, to give it some careful attention, philosophical though the matter may seem to many of our readers. Let us take the famous philosopher's own words as a basis for our study: "A wise man . . . considers which side (of any question) is supported by the greater number of experiments: to that side he inclines with doubt and hesitation; and when at last he fixes his judgment, the evidence exceeds in what we properly call *probability*. All probability, then, supposes an opposition of experiments and observations, where the one side is found to overbalance the other, and to produce a degree of evidence proportioned to the superiority. . . . We entertain a suspicion concerning any matter of fact when the witnesses contradict each other; when they are but few or of a doubtful character; when they have an interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or, on the contrary, with too violent asseverations.

"Suppose, for instance, that the fact which the testimony endeavors to establish partakes of the extraordinary and the marvelous. In that case, the evidence resulting from the testimony admits of a diminution, greater or less, in proportion as the fact is more or less unusual. The reason why we place any credit in witnesses and historians is not derived from any *connection* which we perceive *a priori* between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them. But when the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences, of which the one destroys the other as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains. . . .

"A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be



imagined. . . . Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happened in the common course of nature. It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden; because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen; but it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full *proof*, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior. . . . The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention) 'that no Testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish: and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force which remains after deducting the inferior.' When anyone tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact which he relates should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority which I discover I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates, then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion. There is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure as against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design

to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time attesting facts, performed in such a public manner, and in so celebrated a part of the world as to render the detection unavoidable.

"It forms a strong presumption against all supernatural and miraculous relations, that they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations; or if a civilized people has ever given admission to any of them, that people will be found to have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors, who transmitted them with that inviolable sanction and authority which always attend received opinions. . . . Upon the whole, then, it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof; and that, even supposing it amounted to a proof, it would be opposed by another proof, derived from the very nature of the fact which it would endeavor to establish. It is experience only which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experiences are contrary, we have nothing to do but to subtract the one from the other, and to embrace an opinion either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this subtraction with regard to all popular religions amounts to an entire annihilation; and, therefore, we may establish it as a maxim that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion."<sup>27</sup>

Condensing the primary part of Hume's argument into a simple sentence, his argument is that, when the experience of millions of people can be said to contain nothing miraculous, e.g., a raising of the dead, or the sudden stilling of a storm on the lake, then the testimony of one or two or three



people to some such a miraculous event must be considered definitely of no historical value, because the testimony of millions of other people has a greater power than the testimony of, say, two or three men, for convincing us of the actuality or nonactuality of some miracle.

In beginning our discussion of Hume's argument, it is not unfair to remind ourselves of four factors regarding this famous philosopher. In the first place, he was an agnostic; he did not believe in a living, sovereign, loving, omnipotent God and, therefore, he could not believe in divine miracles. In the second place, it is acknowledged by all Hume's biographers that he had a consuming passion for fame, and it is believed by many of those who have carefully studied his life and writings that Hume wrote this very essay on miracles primarily to bring himself to the attention of British scholars. In this he was successful. In the third place, and this is a strange thing to say, but cannot be denied, many of Hume's ideas are expressed in such sarcastic sentences that sometimes we are not able to tell whether Hume really meant what he said or not. Often he says things which are deliberately opposite to what he believes, and in such a sarcastic and sneering way that the reader knows at once that he means to imply the very opposite of what he says. In the discussion of such a sober subject as miracles, frankly we do not find ourselves forced to give too much attention to a man who writes at times so insincerely. Let us keep to facts, and not to fanciful theories conceived in the gall of bitterness. Finally, it should be noticed that Hume says absolutely nothing about any one specific New Testament miracle. He discusses some of the later miracles supposed to have taken place in the lives of some of the saints, but he never goes into the question of the real evidence for any of the miracles performed by Christ. The reason for this is a simple and fatal one. Hume was not a student of the New Testament. Many believe that Hume never even read the New Testament through

once with any care. Therefore, his entire essay is not the result of a careful study of facts, but the speculations arising from his own prejudice against everything supernatural. He judged the case before he examined the evidence.

We do not have space to enter into all of the points Hume makes, but we are compelled to consider for a moment three or four of his more important statements. When he says that, "it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country," he is saying something that is definitely not true, if historical testimony can be believed. He starts out by stating as a fact what he desires to prove. This is exactly the point we are making in defending the miracles of the New Testament. The miracle of Christ's Resurrection, for example, *was* observed, in the first half of the first century of our era, in a definite locality outside the city wall of Jerusalem; the risen Lord *was* seen by many, on different occasions, during the forty days in which He manifested Himself. It is easy for Hume to *say*, and any man can *say*, that a Resurrection has never been observed in any age or country, but the New Testament definitely claims that resurrections *have* been observed, that of Jairus' daughter, that of Lazarus, that of the son of the widow of Nain, and the Resurrection of our Lord. In the three former cases, there were a number of people who saw these deeds actually performed. To support this sweeping statement of his, Hume would have to prove that the gospel records are historically untrustworthy, and this he does not attempt to do.

It is interesting to note that Hume admits that "no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish." We know that Matthew was a converted tax-collector, a disciple of the Lord Jesus, who lived and worked with Him during His three years of public ministry. We know that Luke was a Gentile physician, and a companion for years of



the great Apostle Paul. John was the greatest of all the original twelve Apostles, and wrote his Gospel when an old man, after bearing testimony to the truth of Christ for at least sixty years. Out of these Gospel records, more power for good has proceeded than out of any other documents of the same size ever written by the hand of men. Upon the testimony of these records, the Christian church has stood solidly for nineteen centuries. Thousands of great scholars in every age have gladly testified that after years of the most careful study, they were compelled uncompromisingly to accept the words of the Gospel records as historically trustworthy. By the preaching of these early disciples, the whole world was transformed, and transformed for the better. By the continued preaching of the truth of these Gospels millions of lives have been transformed in every age. We do not know any adequate reason why these early disciples should have inserted these stories concerning miracles in the Gospel records, unless they rested upon actual historical events. In fact, if the testimony of these Gospels concerning the miracles of Christ is false, then their falsehood is indeed a greater miracle than the miracles which they describe.<sup>28</sup>

The argument that miracles "are observed to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations," or, that civilized people "have received them from ignorant and barbarous ancestors," cannot hold when we are speaking of the miracles of the New Testament. The people of our Lord's day were neither "ignorant" or "barbarous." Among the Jews, it was a matter of pride to send children to school. The reading of the Word of God was a regular custom in all the synagogues of Palestine. The Jews of our Lord's day were profound students of history, and of Old Testament literature. The book of Acts reveals a definitely rich culture in the cities where Paul preached. And if it be granted that the people of our Lord's day were not ignorant people, it can never be allowed that they received such miracle stories from

their "barbarous ancestors." One thing is certain about the miracles of the New Testament, they bear the stamp of originality; they were never carried over from some ancient Hebrew age into the first century of our era. Christ's miracles were not performed among ignorant savages in the depths of dark Africa.

We must say a word, however, about Hume's fundamental argument concerning the *probability* of any event being determined by its relation to ordinary human experience, i.e., if an event accords with what mankind has normally experienced then it can be believed, if the evidence is sufficient; but, if it is contrary to the ordinary experience of men, no matter how great the evidence, it can never be believed. So Hume argues.

Is it not true that if Hume's argument always held, then there could not be any such a thing as advance in scientific research and discovery? For instance, for thousands of years, as far as we know, no human being ever reached that part of our globe technically known as the North Pole. To stand at that spot was something which, down to the beginning of our century, no man, as far as we know, had ever experienced. But one day in 1909 (April 6), a man by the name of Robert E. Peary, an indefatigable explorer, and an accurate observer, *did* stand on that particular spot, and came back to an incredulous world to report his experience. He had an abundance of evidence, astronomical, mathematical, geographical, etc. This evidence was placed before many of the leading scientific societies of the world, and was finally accepted as worthy of absolute belief. Let us say, then, that even in this particular generation, one thousand million people had never stood at the North Pole until one man claimed he did. His experience is contrary to the experiences of all the rest of men living on the earth, at least at that time, yet his evidence was accepted. It is believed that he stood there, though those who do believe have never had the same experience. In like manner, we argue



that the evidence for the Resurrection of Christ is just as great, just as dependable, just as adequate, as that which Peary presented to prove he had been at the North Pole. The evidence of one man in one case, though contrary to the experience of the whole human race, stands unshakeable today, and we believe, with equal conviction, that the evidence for the Resurrection of Christ from the dead, though contrary to the unanimous experience of *almost* the whole human race, is so sufficiently clear and convincing that it warrants our believing that this miracle did take place.

Finally, Hume, somehow in a careless moment, seems to give away the whole case when he himself says, "there may possibly be miracles or violations of the usual course of nature of such a kind as to admit proof from human testimony."

#### MIRACLES AND NATURAL LAW

Probably the most frequently heard argument against miracles, during the last sixty years, let us say, is that the whole universe moves and functions according to what we call natural laws, and that, inasmuch as these natural laws have been determined by God, then God Himself can never be thought to exercise His power in any way to contradict these natural laws, as it would seem He would have to do in the accomplishment of such feats as the miracles of the New Testament. Personally, I have never felt that this argument was as strong as many people make out they believe it is. My own thought of God is of a Being so powerful and so omniscient that He has the right at any time to do anything which He pleases to do, according to His holy will, whether it be exactly within the limits of what we call "natural law" or not. In spite of the author's own feeling in the matter, he is aware that the argument still carries weight with many people, and because of this he gives it due

consideration in this chapter. A *natural law* is simply a description of certain uniform sequences in some particular realm, e.g., in physiology, in astronomy, in radiology. Laws of nature are framed by man, and are only attempts on his part, from the evidence which he has, to ascertain along what lines and under what rules nature works. However, laws of nature as we know them, and describe them, are not self-existent. As a distinguished scientist of our day well reminds us, "the laws of nature, when the mode of their discovery is analyzed, are seen to be merely the most convenient way of stating the results of experience in a form suitable for future reference."<sup>29</sup> Natural laws are "the rules according to which things usually *do* happen; not the rules according to which they *must* happen. Experience shows that natural forces generally work in conformity with fixed laws. But these laws are not intrinsically necessary."<sup>30</sup>

The question now arises as to whether miracles are possible in a world where we observe so many natural laws at work. The answer is an emphatic "yes." As Professor Box has pointed out, "Man in making use of material things, has to do so in accordance with the properties with which God has endowed them. But it is within the Creator's competence to suspend the operation of any natural property, or temporarily to confer upon a body some new property. There are certain things which God *cannot* do. He cannot bring it about that two and two should make five. But this is no limitation of His power. It does not restrict the Divine omnipotence to say that God cannot do what involves contradiction. There is, however, nothing contradictory in the suspension of the operation of a natural property. . . . Nature is pliant enough to admit of divine intervention, and at the same time rigid enough for such intervention to be recognizable. If I throw a stone into the air, I do not dislocate the order of nature or abolish the force of gravity. When human will acts on material forces, it intervenes with



the normal course of their action, but it never destroys them nor takes away their innate tendency to act in a uniform manner. A new force is introduced which counteracts the tendencies of the material forces, just as the material forces interact and counteract among themselves." <sup>31</sup>

The late Professor C. A. Row has brought out this particular point in a very clear, and we believe convincing way, and we take the liberty of quoting an entire paragraph from his valuable work: "A miracle may be performed by the introduction of a force which has sufficient power to counteract the forces of nature even while they are in fullest operation. To take an illustration: It has frequently been said that the force of gravity must have been suspended in favor of Peter's body when he walked on the water, and in favor of our Lord when he ascended into heaven. But this is by no means the case. The mere suspension of the law of gravity would not in either case have affected the results in question. The presence of other forces was necessary. The law of gravity might have been in the fullest operation, and the miracle might have been performed, by the action of other forces adequate to neutralize it. The narrative, itself, implies that this force was so far from being suspended that it was in full operation at the time when the miracle was performed, for the moment the power which supported Peter's body ceased to act he began to sink. . . . The counteraction or modification of one force by the agency of another is an event which we witness every day. The force of gravity is in the fullest operation whenever we lift a weight from the ground—it is not suspended for a single moment. The ability to modify the results of the action of one force by the agency of another, or to combine many forces so as to produce a definite result, constitutes the essence of all mechanical contrivance." <sup>32</sup>

It is surprising how many scientists today admit the possibility of miracles whether they believe that they have

actually happened or not. Sir Oliver Lodge himself has declared that, "as to 'impossibility,' nothing is *a priori* impossible but the self-contradictory. The things you speak about (the miracles of Jesus) are contrary to experience: there is no other impossibility about them."<sup>33</sup>

After all, whether we believe that miracles can happen or not, depends upon our conception of God. As the great philosopher John Stuart Mill, himself a rationalist, has clearly said, "Once admit a God, and the production by His direct volition of an effect which in any case owes its origin to His creative will, is no longer a purely arbitrary hypothesis to account for the fact, but must be reckoned with as a serious possibility. . . . A miracle is no contradiction to the law of cause and effect; it is a new effect, supposed to be produced by the introduction of a new cause."<sup>34</sup>

"The law of the universe is higher than the law of any particular subordinate portion of it. A miracle is not contranatural, but merely supernatural. It is an unwonted exertion of divine power, for which there is a good reason; and this reason once admitted to exist, the miracle is not less credible than an ordinary phenomenon."<sup>35</sup>

I must say that I very much like the entire presentation of this particular aspect of our subject by the great Dutch theologian and scholar, Bernard Bavink, in his excellent work, *Science and God*, and with his fine sentences we close this part of our discussion. "Those who hold to strict casualty in physics, also recognize quite clearly this—an omnipotent God can perform miracles. Why should not a God who settles the laws of nature not be able, if He so desires, to put them out of force? The question whether God can perform miracles is meaningless in itself, it contradicts its subject, namely the omnipotence of God. The only question is whether God has actually performed them, or whether we have reason for supposing that He will, and not can, perform them. But this question is one concerning



only history or biblical criticism. . . . I can only beg all those who seriously think about such problems to examine the question entirely without prejudice from the historical point of view which, of course, must not begin by saying that miracles have not occurred because they are impossible." <sup>36</sup>

#### MIRACLES ARE DEFINITELY RELATED TO THE PERSON AND WORK OF CHRIST

We are speaking throughout this chapter not, of course, of miracles in general, but of the specific miracles which the Lord Jesus Himself is said to have performed. In considering this particular aspect of miracles, we cannot separate the question of their possibility from the person and character of the One who is said to have performed them. The New Testament presents this Person as miraculously conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament reveals this One to have lived an absolutely sinless life, while on earth, utterly pleasing to God every moment, from the time He opened His eyes as a babe until He dismissed His spirit on the cross. This Person is the One of whom it was said, "never man spake like this man" (John 7:46). This is the One who was transfigured on the mount, in the presence of three disciples and Moses and Elijah. This is the One who stands out today as, without question, the greatest person who has ever lived on this earth. This is the One who has brought more sweetness, a deeper desire for truth, a greater longing for holiness, a truer knowledge of God, a more vital hope of life to come, into human history, than all the philosophers of all ages put together. This is the One who has been loved by more people than any other being who ever lived among men. This is the One who has beautified childhood, elevated womanhood, ennobled manhood, established the Church, inspired artists and musicians, as no other

being in all the world has inspired such gifted creatures; who has liberated millions of men from sin, who has brought hope to the dying, comfort to the bereaved, light to those who walk in darkness, liberty to those who were in the bondage of sin. We are not dealing with an ordinary person when we are talking about the miracles of Christ. They appear as a natural part of His marvelous life. They seem to belong to His three years of public ministry. They are not a contradiction of all else that we know about Christ, but they are indeed a very vital part of that ever-to-be-wondered-at portrait of the Son of God which has been sketched by the four artists who wrote the Gospels of our New Testament.

#### CHRIST'S MIRACLES HAVE A DEFINITE PURPOSE

Furthermore, we must recognize that the miracles, whether we believe them to be true miracles or not, had a definite and important place in the life of our Lord.

"If it was God's will to give a revelation, miracles are well fitted to certify it and guarantee it as a true communication from Him. A doubtful revelation is useless. It must be attested in such a way that its authority is obvious to all, even to the uneducated and ignorant. If a miracle occurs in connection with the word or act of a person who professes to deliver a revelation from God, the coincidence proclaims the Divine approval of the teacher and his message. A miracle is the seal which God sets upon His revelation and upon His representatives, in order to certify beyond all doubt their supernatural character. If, therefore, God bestows upon Jesus the power to perform miracles in ratification of His teaching, He therefore declares Him to be His representative. But if Jesus shows that it is by His own power that He works miracles, He thereby proves Himself to be the Lord of the universe and very God.

"If a man claims to be invested with authority to report a Divine communication, and appeals to miracles in testimony of his supernatural mission, the argument thus provided is incon-



trovertible. The exercise of Divine power vouches for the Divine origin of the message. Provided that it is certain that the event appealed to is really a miracle, there can be no possible doubt that the message is a true revelation from God, for a miracle could never be worked for the reinforcement of a false doctrine. . . .

"Since God's revelation is for all, for the simple as well as for the learned, physical miracles in that they appeal not only to the intellect but also to the senses, are in a special manner adapted to certify the truth of the revelation."<sup>37</sup>

#### THE POSSIBILITY OF MIRACLES DETERMINED BY OUR CONCEPTION OF GOD

Finally, we believe, as many writers have confessed, that our conviction regarding the reality or non-reality of miracles will be determined by our conception of God.<sup>38</sup> If a man does not believe in God, of course he will not believe in miracles. If a man does not believe that God rules in the universe, of course he will reject miracles before he even examines the evidence for such events. If one even has a fundamental conviction that, though God lives, God has ordained that the world should move in every moment of time according to those laws which man has discovered regarding nature and himself, then that man has already determined that miracles will not occur on earth in the midst of any series of historical events. If, on the other hand, we believe in the God of the Bible, in a God who created the world, in a God who judged Sodom and Gomorrah, in a God who delivered the Israelites from the Egyptians, if we believe in the God of whom Jesus spoke, and who in turn spoke from heaven concerning His Son, if we believe in One who is omnipotent, omniscient, absolutely holy, and compassionate, if we believe that Christ was actually sent into the world by the Father to save men from sin, and to bestow on them eternal life, then miracles can easily be accepted. Granting that

we have strong reasons for believing in the historical validity of the Gospel records, granting that the miracles of Christ as they are recorded in the Gospels are not fanciful or silly, granting that our Lord Himself placed heavy emphasis upon these works which He did among men, then it seems that our final decision regarding our belief in or rejection of the miracles of the New Testament must ultimately depend upon our conception of God. And from what source are we to derive a true conception of God? We do not look, in this day, for such truth in the ancient writers of Greece and Rome, for their deities long ago vanished; certainly not from the religions of India and Africa, for their gods are many, and revoltingly lascivious; certainly not from our modern philosophers, for they contradict each other, they change their opinions as their own lives develop—they write in language which the common man on the street will never be able to understand, and most of them come to the conclusion that there is no God, and in this conclusion they seem to be most wretched pessimists. Certainly not from science, for science confesses itself that it cannot speak with finality concerning the character of God, though, for the most part, it recognizes a supreme being. Where in all the world can one find set before him, reasonably, historically, a God so great, so good, so holy, so compassionate, so truth-loving, so willing to redeem men, so eager to lift, to emancipate, so utterly glorious, so without fault or blemish, or shame or shortcomings, as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, whom He came to reveal in His precious and holy and glorious life? The Christ of miracles is our supreme authority for a God of miracles. Both belong together, and over all is not the dim haze of pagan myths, nor the mist of man's imaginings, but the clear, sweet morning air of the grace of God as it came down to earth to save poor, bound, stumbling, broken-hearted disillusioned men.



## THE TESTIMONY OF DR. SAMUEL JOHNSON

One evening in the summer of 1763, when the great lexicographer, Dr. Samuel Johnson, at that time fifty-four years of age, was talking in his rooms with his future biographer, James Boswell, they got on to the discussion of the writings of David Hume, to whom we have referred above, Johnson remarking that "Hume, and other skeptical innovators are vain men, and will gratify themselves at any expense. Truth will not afford sufficient food to their vanity; so they have betaken themselves to error." Boswell, in mentioning Hume's argument against miracles, brought forth one of Johnson's characteristic glorious statements concerning profound themes, and we think at the end of this chapter we could do no better than to quote these words, coming as they do from one of the greatest scholars and students that has ever adorned English history. "Why, Sir, the great difficulty of proving miracles should make us very cautious in believing them. But let us consider; although God has made Nature to operate by certain fixed laws, yet it is not unreasonable to think that He may suspend those laws, in order to establish a system highly advantageous to mankind. Now the Christian Religion is a most beneficial system, as it gives us light and certainty where we were before in darkness and doubt. The miracles which prove it are attested by men who had no interest in deceiving us; but who, on the contrary, were told that they should suffer persecution, and did actually lay down their lives in confirmation of the truth of the facts which they asserted. Indeed, for some centuries the heathens did not pretend to deny the miracles; but said they were performed by the aid of evil spirits. This is a circumstance of great weight. Then, Sir, when we take the proofs derived from prophecies which have been so exactly fulfilled, we have most satisfactory evidence. Supposing a miracle possible, as to which, in my opinion, there can

be no doubt, we have as strong evidence for the miracles in support of Christianity, as the nature of the thing admits."<sup>39</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> George P. Fisher: *Essays on the Supernatural Origin of Christianity*, New and Enlarged Ed., New York, 1870, pp. 13, 14. See A. B. Bruce: *The Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, New York, 1886, pp. 369-372.

<sup>2</sup> George P. Fisher, *ibid.*, p. 477.

<sup>3</sup> J. W. M. Kaftan: *The Truth of the Christian Religion*, E. T., Vol. II, pp. 397, 398.

<sup>4</sup> C. A. Row: *The Supernatural in the New Testament: Possible, Credible and Historical*, London, 1875, p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> T. H. Wright: Art. "Miracles" in *J. Hastings' Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, Vol. II, p. 189.

<sup>6</sup> C. A. Row, *ibid.*, p. 503. "The non-miraculous and the miraculous incidents with which these memorable controversies are found associated in the Gospel records must be accepted as alike historical. The former are unmistakably so. Who would ever dream, e.g. of inventing the story about the plucking of the ears of corn? The latter must not be rejected merely because they happen to be miraculous. They must be received without hesitation as a part of the history, all the more that they form only a part. Had all the occasions of conflict been miracles we might have suspected invention. As it is, we feel that miracles have a place among the incidents which gave rise to collisions, in the records, because they had a place in the actual history of Jesus." A. B. Bruce, *ibid.*, pp. 120, 121.

<sup>7</sup> William M. Taylor: *The Gospel Miracles in Their Relation to Christ and Christianity*, New York, 1880, p. 7. See also James Orr: *The Christian View of God and the World*, 1893, pp. 232, 233.

<sup>8</sup> Charles W. Rishell: *The Foundations of the Christian Faith*, Second ed., New York, 1901, p. 238. See also pp. 260-264, and an appendix, "The Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels Compared," in John H. Best: *The Miracles of Christ*, London, 1937, pp. 174-176.

<sup>9</sup> See, further, A. B. Bruce, *ibid.*, pp. 121-124.

<sup>10</sup> Hubert S. Box: *Miracles and Critics*, London, 1935, pp. 66-70.

<sup>11</sup> For full details see the *Illustrated London News*, June 6, 1936, and June 19, 1937.



<sup>12</sup> Some days after completing this paragraph, I came upon the very interesting comment on this particular aspect of our subject by Professor A. B. Bruce, and though the quotation is an extended one, I believe it is worth copying in full for our readers. "I cannot pass from this topic without remarking that, while conceding the claims of 'moral therapeutics' to be something more than an invention of critics or apologists, I do not share the sanguine expectations of Mr. Arnold. I should be only too glad to believe that a time will come when physicians or saints will be able to give the blind their sight, to make the deaf hear, to restore to palsied limbs their strength, and to confer sanity on diseased minds. Again and again we find it written in the Gospels that multitudes suffering from all sorts of diseases gathered around Jesus, and that He healed them all. How happy will the world be when in every great centre of population there will be men of medical skill or saintly character, or say a single man, who can become such a centre of life and health for suffering millions! But, alas! I am not able to rise to the height of this great hope! I believe that there are ample resources for the healing art remaining yet undiscovered in nature's bosom; for I am optimist enough to think that there are rudiments of a gospel of mercy to be found even there. I do not despair of a time when specific cures for diseases hitherto incurable will be discovered. But I do not expect a time when physicians will be able by a touch to heal leprosy, by a word to open the eyes of one blind from his birth, or to restore to reason a raving maniac, or to enable a palsied one to rise and walk. The theory of moral therapeutics will not apply to such cases, and in all time coming it will probably be necessary for unbelievers in the supernatural to have recourse to the alternative method for getting rid of the miraculous element in the Gospels, that of mistake on the part of the reporters." A. B. Bruce, *ibid.*, pp. 55, 56.

<sup>13</sup> John H. Best, *ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> See Alexander Mair: *Studies in the Christian Evidences*, 3d ed., rev., Edinburgh, 1894, pp. 203, 204.

<sup>15</sup> Hubert S. Box: *ut supra*, p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur C. Headlam: *The Miracles of the New Testament*, London, 1914, pp. 36-39.

<sup>17</sup> Marcus Dods: *The Supernatural in Christianity*, Edinburgh, 1894, pp. 75-80.

<sup>18</sup> Arthur C. Headlam: *ut supra*, pp. 48, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce Barton: *The Man Nobody Knows, A Discovery of Jesus*, Indianapolis, 1925, pp. 52-54.

<sup>20</sup> Hubert S. Box: *ut supra*, p. 110.

<sup>21</sup> J. R. Illingworth: *The Gospel Miracles*, London, 1915, pp. 53-55.

<sup>22</sup> Adolf Harnack: *What Is Christianity?* E. T., p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> Ernest Findlay Scott: *The Validity of the Gospel Record*, New York, 1938, p. 21.

<sup>24</sup> James Moffatt: *The Approach to the New Testament*, London, 1921, pp. 128-131.

<sup>25</sup> David Strauss: *The New Life of Jesus*, E. T., Vol. I, p. 199.

<sup>26</sup> John Herman Randall, Jr.: *The Making of the Modern Mind*, New York, 1926, pp. 537, 538.

<sup>27</sup> David Hume: *Philosophical Works*, Edinburgh, 1826, Vol. IV, "An Inquiry Concerning the Human Understanding," Sect. 10, "Of Miracles," pp. 129-150.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Ballard: *The Miracles of Unbelief*, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> W. C. D. Dampier Whetham: *The Recent Development of Physical Science*, Fifth Ed., p. 39.

<sup>30</sup> Hubert S. Box: *ut supra*, pp. 36, 37.

<sup>31</sup> Hubert S. Box: *ut supra*, pp. 45-56.

<sup>32</sup> C. A. Row, *ibid.*, pp. 127-129.

<sup>33</sup> Sir Oliver Lodge, in a letter to the author, E. O. Davies, quoted in the latter's book *The Miracles of Jesus*, pp. 26, 27. "It must, however, be distinctly recognized that there exists, and can exist, no *a priori* proof of the impossibility of what are called miracles. If that impossibility has sometimes been asserted by exponents of Natural Science, the assertion is merely a piece of *a priori* dogmatism quite incapable of substantiation on scientific grounds." C. W. Hobson: *Domain of Natural Science*, p. 490. See also Alexis Carrel: *Man the Unknown*. New York, 1935, pp. 148, 149.

<sup>34</sup> J. S. Mill: *System of Logic*, 6th ed., Vol. II, Book 3, pp. 163, 164.

<sup>35</sup> George P. Fisher: *ut supra*, p. xix.

<sup>36</sup> Bernhard Bavink: *Science and God*, New York, 1934, pp. 132, 133.

<sup>37</sup> Hubert S. Box, *ut supra*, pp. 79-81. See Illingworth, *ut supra*, pp. 46-48; also James McCosh: *The Supernatural in Relation to the Natural*, New York, 1862, pp. 246-256; and Alexander Mair, *ibid.*, pp. 199-204.

<sup>38</sup> A. J. Balfour: *Foundations of Belief*, London, 1895, p. 210. The following words of one of the profoundest thinkers of the last generation as well as one of its greatest statesmen, should be most carefully considered, not only in the matter of belief con-



cerning miracles but in our frequently coming upon statements by rationalists that they do not believe in anything partaking of the supernatural. "Are we to say that the results of the work of the rationalising temper are the works of reason? Surely not. The rationalist rejects miracles; and if you force him to a discussion, he may no doubt produce from the ample stores of past controversy plenty of argument in support of his belief. But do not therefore assume that his belief is the result of his argument. The odds are strongly in favor of argument and belief, having both grown up under the fostering influence of his 'psychological climate!'"

<sup>39</sup> James Boswell: *The Life of Samuel Johnson*, the edition edited by Arnold Glover, London, 1901, Vol. I, pp. 294, 296.

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

### SYNOPSIS

- I. The Neglect of the Subject of the Transfiguration in Modern Christological Literature.
- II. What the Gospel Records Say Happened at the Transfiguration.
  1. The radiant Christ.
  2. The appearance of Moses and Elijah.
  3. The voice from heaven.
- III. Reasons for Believing the Transfiguration to Be an Historical Event.
  1. The harmony of the Gospel records.
  2. It is placed between other events which are undeniably historical.
  3. The Gospel writers would not have dared to record such an amazing episode if it were but a creation of their imagination.
  4. None of the disciples would have imagined Simon Peter making such a foolish suggestion as the one here attributed to him.
  5. Peter himself lived during the years these Gospels were originally circulated. Would he not have denied such a story, if it were not true?
  6. The narratives themselves give the definite impression of reality.
  7. The later testimony of the Apostle Peter.
- IV. Some Theories That Have Been Offered to Account for This Narrative in the Gospels.
  1. That such an event was expected by the Jews to be the experience of the Messiah when he appeared.
  2. The theory of mythological origin.
  3. The theory that this was but a dream of Simon Peter's.
  4. The theory of pagan origin.
- V. The Supernaturalness of the Transfiguration.
- VI. The Significance of the Transfiguration.



## CHAPTER V

### THE TRANSFIGURATION

THE Transfiguration of our Lord is recorded in all of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 9:2-13; Luke 9:28-36). The word "transfiguration" is derived directly from the Latin word, *transfiguratio*, meaning, a *transformation*; this, in turn, is from the Latin verb *transfiguro*, meaning, *to transform*, or *to transfigure*. Thus, in the Latin Vulgate, the phrase in Matthew's account, "He was transfigured," reads, "transfiguratus est."

#### THE STRANGE NEGLECT OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

Though the Transfiguration is one of the most astonishing of all the experiences of our Lord while on earth, for no adequate reason (we would not say without any reason) it has not been given in Christological literature, and most emphatically in apologetic literature, the consideration to which it is entitled. Professor Bruce opens his excellent chapter on this subject exclaiming: "The transfiguration is one of those passages in the Saviour's earthly history which an expositor would rather pass over in reverent silence. For such silence the same apology might be pleaded which is so kindly made in the Gospel narrative for Peter's foolish speech concerning the three tabernacles: 'He wist not what to say.' Who does know what to say any more than he? Who is able fully to speak of that wondrous night-scene among the mountains, during which Heaven was for a few brief moments let down to earth, and the

mortal body of Jesus being transfigured shone with celestial brightness, and the spirits of just men made perfect appeared and held converse with Him respecting His approaching passion, and a Voice came forth from the excellent glory, pronouncing Him to be God's well-beloved Son?"<sup>1</sup>

When Professor William Ernest Beet wrote his valuable hand-book, *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, he said that so far as he was aware, his volume was "the first attempt at a separate treatment of the transfiguration," and added that the reason for it might be found in the fact that, "while its sublimity and splendor are really admitted, it is regarded, perhaps for this reason, as having no very close connection with the every-day life and spiritual perplexities of men."<sup>2</sup>

Consequently, because the subject of our Lord's Transfiguration is rarely given careful consideration in apologetic literature, and is almost never referred to these days by contemporary rationalists, perhaps much of the material in this chapter will be found to relate to matters which many readers of this book have not previously considered, at least with any real seriousness.

In our present study, while we cannot avoid discussing the purpose and meaning of this great event, more so than in any of the other subjects we are investigating, yet primarily we want to center our attention upon *the historical reality* of that which is said to have taken place "on a high mountain apart."

#### WHAT THE GOSPEL RECORDS SAY HAPPENED AT THE TRANSFIGURATION

We perhaps will be best prepared to discuss the historical validity of these narratives by rehearsing what the Synoptic writers tell us happened on this particular occasion. There are, it seems to me, thirteen different points which



the narratives present—generally all three of the Synoptic accounts give the same information, occasionally only two, while now and then a few details are recorded by only one. (1) Matthew and Mark agree that the Transfiguration occurred six days after Peter's great confession at Caesarea Philippi, which would probably also be six days after Christ's first great prediction of His death and resurrection. Luke says that this intervening period was "about eight days." This variation need not detain us: Luke definitely says he does not intend that his figure should be minutely accurate, and, what is more, Matthew and Mark could easily have referred to a period of six days according to Jewish reckoning, whereas Luke might have included the day on which the confession of Peter took place which would, at least, make seven. (2) All the Synoptics agree that Christ took with Him on this occasion His three closest disciples—Peter, James, and John. (3) All three agree that it was up into a "mountain" that the Lord took these three companions of His. Matthew and Mark add that the mountain was a "high" one; Luke adds the interesting point that it was "to pray" that the four ascended the mountain. (4) All agree that on the mountain our Lord was "transfigured." Matthew and Mark actually use the same word; Luke does not use this particular word, but instead, the fuller phrase, "the fashion of His countenance was altered." (5) All agree that there appeared on the mountain, talking with Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Luke adds the very significant phrase that they "spake of His decease, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." (6) Only Luke specifically tells us that the three disciples "were weary with sleep." (7) All three record the foolish suggestion of Simon Peter's, that three tabernacles should be built there on the mountain—one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. (8) All three records speak of a cloud overshadowing the assembled disciples. (9) All agree that the three disciples were afraid. (10) All Synoptics record a

voice being heard, declaring that the One standing in their midst, the Lord Jesus, was indeed the Beloved Son of God. (11) All agree that after the voice was heard, the disciples looking around "saw no one, save Jesus only." (12) All record the descent from the mountain. (13) Matthew and Mark give us the words of the Lord commanding the disciples to tell no one about this amazing experience until after He should rise from the dead.

Where this event took place, we are not sure, nor does it really matter. A few have thought that the mountain was none other than the Mount of Olives, directly East of the city of Jerusalem, but this is out of all consideration when we realize that the confession of Peter was given far north of Jerusalem at Caesarea Philippi; nor could the Mount of Olives be spoken of as "a high mountain." Many of the earlier expositors and Church Fathers believed that the mountain was Mount Tabor, but most modern New Testament scholars seem to agree that the mountain most appropriate for a setting such as this, and conveniently near Caesarea Philippi, is none other than Mt. Hermon, over nine thousand feet above sea level. The identification of the mountain has nothing to do, however, with the historical trustworthiness of the narrative.

It is commonly believed, though even here we cannot be dogmatic in the matter, that the transfiguration itself took place at night, for "night was generally the time of His retirement for prayer (compare Luke 6:12 and 9:28); the disciples were 'heavy with sleep' and had to 'keep themselves awake'; and they descended the mountain, 'the next day,' that is, after spending the night on its summit."<sup>3</sup>

We are now ready to ask ourselves exactly what happened on the mountain in this remarkable experience, granting that we will never be able to fully penetrate the mysteries of this event. Matthew and Mark say, "He was transfigured before them." The word here translated "transfigured" is the Greek word *metamorphoo*, meaning,



to change into another form. From this word comes our English word *metamorphosis*, used, e.g., in speaking of the change of a worm, which wraps itself in the silk of a cocoon, only to make its exit in the spring as a butterfly. The word occurs in Romans 12:2, in reference to the change of moral character, and in II Cor. 3:18, referring to the change which Christians now experience, indwelt by the Spirit of God, culminating ultimately in the great change which will take place at the Resurrection, when we will have a body like unto the Lord's own glorious body. Fundamentally, then, we may say that the word simply means "to change into another form." This, however, we must admit, is in itself somewhat vague, for there can be many changes into many forms. There is such a thing as a *physical* change, a *mental* change, a *spiritual* change, and a *moral* change. Can we ascertain more exactly the nature of the change which was here undergone by our Lord? Matthew says, "His face did shine as the sun, and His garments became white as the light." Mark says, "His garments became glistening, exceeding white." Luke, more fully, writes, "The fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became white and dazzling." At least then, we are justified in saying that there was some *actual physical change* in our Lord's body. While emphasis is placed upon the shining of His face, it is *He* who was transfigured, as though the change they saw in His countenance was but the visible manifestation of a change that had taken place in His entire body. Matthew says that "His garments became white as the light." Mark practically says the same thing. Luke's phrase is, "His raiment became white and dazzling." The record clearly implies that these garments were not shining like sunlight, or like snow, dazzling white, because of any light that was cast upon them from without, but *from the emergence through these garments of the brilliant light emanating from the transfigured body of the Lord.*

"The three aorists in Matthew and the two in Mark report objective facts, actual changes in Jesus Himself, and not something merely subjective, only in the eyes and minds of the three disciples. . . . When the disciples looked at the countenance of Jesus, they looked at a refulgence as brilliant and dazzling as the sun itself. Mark's note about the garments 'such as a fuller on earth is not able to whiten,' implies that the whiteness was altogether unearthly. Instead of here thinking of the radiance on the face of Moses, as so many do, we have far more reason to think of John's vision of Jesus in Rev. 1:13-15."<sup>4</sup>

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, in his epochal work, *The Crisis of the Christ*, has so concisely and yet profoundly set forth the meaning of the light which radiated from Christ during His Transfiguration, that we can do no better than quote his entire paragraph on this particular point:

"This glory was not the light of heaven falling upon Him from above. Nor was it a merely reflected radiance which resulted from communion. When Moses descended from the mount, his face shone so that men could not look upon it. That glory was the reflection of the light in which he had sojourned in the solemn days of his absence, and even that was so brilliant that men could not look upon it, and he had to veil his face. Later on, when the first martyr was about to pass from earth to heaven, upon his face there rested a glory so that when men looked upon him 'They saw his face as it had been the face of an angel' (Acts 6:15). But these are very different matters from the radiant splendour of the Master on the mount. That was the glory of His own face. Of His own Person, shining through the veil that had hidden it, until the very raiment of His humanity sparkled and glistened and flashed with the splendour of light and snow and lightning. The Transfiguration was effected, not by glory falling on Him, but by inherent glory flashing forth. To depict that splendour is impossible with brush, or pencil, or pen."<sup>5</sup>

This, I think, is as far as we can go in actually saying *what* happened to the body of Christ that day. Whatever



it was, we have no record of such an experience on the part of any other man in all history. The somewhat similar and yet very different experience of Moses we will refer to later.

#### THE APPEARANCE OF MOSES AND ELIJAH

While Christ was transfigured, two men appeared, Moses and Elijah, and were heard talking with Jesus concerning His *decease*, or death, which He was soon to accomplish in Jerusalem. It is not necessary for our purpose to enter into the question as to *how* Moses and Elijah, dead centuries before, could reappear on the mountain, and be recognized by the disciples. If the record is trustworthy, all we can do is to attempt to understand what the record says, recognizing there are mysteries here, as there are mysteries everywhere, which cannot be fully explained. Yet, as Archbishop Trench has well said, "That elevation of their whole spiritual life, in which alone they could have seen these sights at all, will have left them in no doubt concerning those whom they now saw. Their recognition of them we must regard as immediate and intuitive. It is the same question as is sometimes asked about Paul, namely—how he should have seen in a vision a man whose name he knew to be Ananias (Acts 9:12). It can only be replied that the vision which showed him the man imparted to him also the name of the man. But while this question may thus be dismissed, we cannot so dismiss another, namely, why the two who appeared should be exactly Moses and Elijah. It was not merely that among all the prophets and saints of the Old Testament these were the two of whom the one had not died (II Kings 2:2), and the other had no sooner tasted of death, than probably his body was withdrawn from under the dominance of death and of him that had the power of death (Deut. 34:6; Jude 9); the two, therefore, whose apparition in glorified bodies before the day of Resurrection had less in it per-

plexing than that of any others would have had. This was something; but much more that these two were the acknowledged heads and representatives, the one of the Law, the other of the prophets; in which Law and prophets, the whole Old Testament, is commonly summed up (Matt. 7:12)."<sup>6</sup>

These two celestial visitors, as far as we know, spoke to the Lord Jesus exclusively about one impending event, that for which Christ became Incarnate, that without which there would have been no redemption for you and me, namely, Christ's *death*, spoken of by Luke as "His *decease*," or, literally, as it is in the Greek, "His *exodus*." The Apostle Peter later uses this very word in referring to his own decease (II Peter 1:15).

To continue the classical exposition of Archbishop Trench: "'Decease' has now become so mere a synonym for death, it has so much lost its proper sense of departure, i.e., out of this life, that, as we read in the English, we are in danger of mixing, indeed we can hardly help missing, an allusion which must at once suggest itself to every reader of the Greek. We fail to mark the relation, which the sacred historian could scarcely not have intended us to recognize, between this 'exodus' and an earlier; to recognize in this an 'accomplishing' or fulfilling, as he is careful to note, by the Saviour at Jerusalem of an 'exodus' (Heb. 11:22) which Moses and Joshua had begun in Egypt and in the wilderness, but had not accomplished (Heb. 4); the 'exodus,' that is, or going out of God's people, their Captain and Commander leading the way, from this present evil world."<sup>7</sup>

#### THE VOICE FROM HEAVEN

While Peter was foolishly suggesting to the Lord that three tabernacles be immediately built on the mountain, one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, a bright



cloud descended on the assembled group, and from the cloud a voice was heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him."

Assuming for the moment, before we discuss the trustworthiness of this particular event, that *a voice* was actually heard, it could have been none other than the voice of God the Father. The Father had similarly spoken concerning His Son immediately after the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 4:17). He was later to speak thus once again concerning the Lord shortly before the Crucifixion (John 12:28). "All three divine announcements served one end. Elicited at crises in Christ's history, when He manifested in peculiar intensity His devotion to the work for which He had come into the world, and His determination to finish it, however irksome the task might be to flesh and blood, these voices expressed, for His encouragement and strengthening, the complacency with which His Father regarded His self-humiliation and obedience unto death."<sup>8</sup>

The words of Archbishop Trench are so rich and full, even though they are of an expository, and not exactly an apologetic nature, that we take the liberty of quoting them in this place, that those of our readers who really want to enter into the deeper meanings of this great transaction might have a masterly interpretation to guide them in their study.

"In respect of the heavenly salutation itself, the emphasis should not be so much laid on 'This' as on 'Son'; for the true parallel to the present salutation of the Son by the Father, with the installation of the Son in the highest place of the kingdom, is to be found at Heb. 1:1. 'God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son.' He is to be heard above all others, because He is not a servant in the house of another, as were Moses and Elias, but a Son in His own (Heb. 3:5). In the words themselves of this majestic installation there is a remarkable honouring of the Old Testament, and of it in all

its parts, which can scarcely be regarded as accidental; for the three several clauses of that salutation are drawn severally from the Psalms (Ps. 2:7), the Prophets (Isai. 42:1), and the Law (Deut. 18:5); and together proclaim Him concerning whom they are spoken to be the King, the Priest, and the Prophet of the New Covenant. St. Peter therefore might very fitly declare that in this voice from heaven 'He received from God the Father honour and glory' (2 Pet. 1:17). And first, 'This is my beloved Son'; but the King's Son is Himself the King; 'yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Sion' (Ps. 2:6). And then, 'in whom I am well pleased'; holy, therefore, harmless and undefiled, fairer than the children of men (Ps. 45:2), the sceptre of whose kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness (Heb. 1:8), for in no other could God take a perfect pleasure; and thus the Priest who could and should offer Himself without spot to God (Heb. 9:14; I John 3:5). But then, further, He is the One whom all are commanded to obey: 'Hear ye Him'; therefore henceforth the sole Prophet of his Church; Moses, or the Law, has passed away, for that was the shadow and outline of good things to come (Col. 2:17; Heb. 8:5; 10:1), while in Him is the substance of good things actually present; Elias, or the prophets, has passed away, for in Him all prophecy is fulfilled (Luke 16:16; I Cor. 13:8)."<sup>9</sup>

#### REASONS FOR BELIEVING THE TRANSFIGURATION TO BE AN HISTORICAL EVENT

Having given some account, however brief, of what actually happened on the mountain when our Lord was transfigured, it is time to turn to the very serious question: Is this a record of an actual historical occurrence? In spite of the fact that there are a number of miracles definitely concentrated in these few verses, that the event certainly is to be taken as an historical one is shown: (1) by the remarkable harmony that prevails throughout the three Synoptic accounts of this occurrence; (2) by the fact that the events recorded as taking place immediately before the Transfiguration, and those taking place immediately subsequent to the Transfiguration, are undeniably his-



torical, the first leading up to the Transfiguration, the second naturally flowing from the Transfiguration, thus requiring that we consider the central episode an historical sequence of the one and an historical preface to the other; (3) by the natural conviction that concerning an episode so amazing, so utterly unlike anything else even hinted at in our Lord's life, no one of the Synoptic writers could be conceived as daring to *imagine* such an event as this, and then bold enough to put it in these holy narratives, unless it had actually occurred; (4) by the fact that it would never have entered the minds of the three writers that Simon Peter could have made such a silly and foolish suggestion as he did, unless the words were actually spoken—it is about the last thing that one would expect at a moment like this. (5) Unless there was an historical reality behind this record, it would seem that Peter himself would have denied that he had ever been an eye-witness of such an astounding experience, and the narrative would have been excised from the Gospel records long before the last quarter of the first century, for Peter lived during the years Matthew and Mark were composed. (6) Furthermore, as a well-known New Testament scholar has reminded us, "The narratives throw upon the mind of the reader the most powerful sense of the reality of the event. Their primary impression is of the outward actuality of the scene. The structure defies dissection, the substance invention. The simple naturalness of the one, the stupendous magnitude of the other, betray no indications of artificiality." <sup>10</sup>

(7) Finally, we have the later testimony of the Apostle Peter, given nearly forty years after the Transfiguration had taken place. The Apostle Peter in his Second Epistle (we are not here engaging in a discussion of the Petrine authorship of the Second Epistle—while many New Testament scholars deny that it can be from Peter's pen, a great number of equally great scholars insist that it was written

by Simon Peter, and we take it thus to be in this discussion), makes very few references to anything in the life of the Lord, with whom he had walked and talked for three years, aside from the frequent mention of Christ's holy death and glorious Resurrection. There is one notable exception, namely, the detailed recalling of the Transfiguration, of which he himself was an eyewitness. His words are striking and powerful: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the father honor and glory, when there was borne such a voice to Him by the Majestic Glory—this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased: and this voice, we, *ourselves*, heard borne out of Heaven, when we were with Him in the holy mountain" (II Peter 1:16-18).

Weymouth translates this last verse in a way that bears repeating: "And we ourselves heard these words come from Heaven, when we were with Him on the holy mountain."

Here we find ourselves on what surely must be called "solid ground." The miracle of regeneration cannot be seen with the eye, though its evidences ought to be plainly evident; a Transfiguration should be capable of being *seen*, and, according to our Gospel records, was beheld by these disciples. The eyes that you and I have are no different from the eyes that Peter, James, and John had. The gospels often speak of the things that Peter and John had actually *seen* with their own eyes. (See, e.g., John 20:6, 8, 20; 21:9, 20, 21.)

Peter definitely means to affirm by this passage that the same eyes which had seen so much during our Lord's ministry, had, by the same laws of nature, beheld an actual change in the body of Christ, which made Him so radiant that His face shone like the sun, and His garments seemed as white as snow. If Peter did not see what he says he saw, then either he was deceived himself, or he lied about what



he saw, or he means by "seeing" the majesty of Christ something altogether different from what we would mean when we speak of "seeing" this or that object.

To me it would almost seem that the voice which was heard is in some ways even more significant than the physical change which was undergone by our Lord. I must confess that, from the earliest days of my ministry, this sentence spoken from Heaven has fascinated me. You and I hear according to the same laws that all the disciples heard when they were on earth. Almost invariably we know, when answering the telephone, if the voice is the voice of our employer, our father, our son, a dear friend. What is more important, we know what that voice is saying. When the housewife orders two loaves of bread sent to the house, she does not expect two dozen loaves of bread when the order is delivered. Two means two, and not two dozen. When the agent at the railroad station says that the train for New York will leave from Chicago at 5 P.M., he is not misunderstood to have said "8 P.M." or "10 P.M." Thousands and thousands of people make train connections every day in this country, because of information received by them through the ear.

I remember once visiting in the home of a distinguished southern lawyer, and hearing a famous financier of New York City, also at the time a guest there, tell his secretary, in New York, over the long distance telephone, to change the amount of stock in a new company about to be launched, from nineteen million dollars to twenty-one million dollars. A difference of two million dollars! And the change was made simply because a few words were heard by the ear of a person listening hundreds of miles away from where a voice was speaking. Millions and millions of dollars of business is transacted every business day in the great financial centers of our country, simply because of orders given by ear, and taken by ear. *We can depend upon our hearing.* We do depend upon our hearing. And much that

you and I believe today, we believe because of the things that we have heard. Now, Matthew, and Mark, and Luke also, say that *a voice was heard*, coming from above, declaring that the one, Christ Jesus, was the beloved Son of God. Forty years later, Peter repeats that this is what he and his companions *heard* that day. If the things which the ear hears, and the mind retains, can be used as dependable evidence for the ascertaining of the historicity of any event, then this four-fold testimony gives us the greatest assurance that the words here recorded were actually heard by these men. If one chooses to repudiate such testimony, one may do so, but such repudiation will be without any justifiable grounds.

#### SOME THEORIES THAT HAVE BEEN OFFERED TO ACCOUNT FOR THIS NARRATIVE IN THE GOSPELS

We cannot close this discussion of the truthfulness of these narratives without looking for a moment at some of the theories which have been proposed to explain away what happened. The great German rationalist, Strauss, suggests that this event can be accounted for by the fact that the Jewish people of Christ's day expected the Messiah when He came, to bare—at least upon certain occasions—a radiant face such as Moses when he came down from communing with God on the mountain (Ex. 34:29). Perhaps we would do well to quote the entire passage of Strauss on this particular point:

"To comprehend how such a narrative could be formed by the legend, we should examine, in the first place, the peculiarity to the essence of which the other peculiarities most readily attach themselves, viz., the brilliance which rendered the face of Jesus like the sun and the bright light with which even his garments were invested. For the Orientals, and in particular for the Hebrews, the fine and majestic is almost always connected with something luminous. Solomon in his Songs compares his beloved



to the morning, to the noon, to the sun (6:10); pious men sustained by the divine blessing are compared to the sun in his glory (Judges 5:31); and especially the future life of the blessed is compared to the brilliance of the firmament (Daniel 13:3; Matt. 13:43). In consequence, not only does God appear in a burst of light, and the angels with luminous countenances and shining garments (Psalm 50:2 and 3; Daniel 7:9; 10:5 and 6; Luke 24:4; Rev. 1:13-16), but also the pious individuals of Jewish antiquity. . . . In the same way the Jewish posterior legend endowed distinguished rabbins with supernatural light in certain moments of exaltation. . . .

"The fact is," he adds, somewhat inconsistently, "it was expected that the Messiah would have a bright and shining countenance like that of Moses, or even surpassing that in splendour, and a Jewish work, which takes no notice of this history of the Transfiguration, draws an argument altogether in the spirit of the Jews when he (the author) affirms that Jesus could not have been the Messiah inasmuch as His face had not the brightness of the face of Moses much less any superior brightness. The first Christians must have heard like objections on the part of the Jews or they must have made them to themselves; the necessary consequence of which would be, in the most ancient church, a tendency to reproduce in the life of Jesus this trait from the life of Moses, to exaggerate it even in a certain respect, and to attribute to Jesus, were it only for a short space of time, instead of a shining face, which might have been covered with a cloth, a brilliance which was spread even over his garments."<sup>11</sup>

The answer to this fantastic theory is not difficult. To begin with, there is absolutely no evidence in the extra-biblical literature of the first century that the Jews did expect the Messiah to have an experience somewhat like that which Moses had. Secondly, if these Gospel writers attempted, without any evidence for such an event, to incorporate something similar to the experience of Moses on Mt. Sinai in the life of Jesus, why should they make their narrative depart so radically from the record concerning Moses in the book of Exodus, and then adding,

if writing only from their own imagination, the silly suggestion of Simon Peter's about three permanent tabernacles? Moreover, if they constructed these narratives of the Transfiguration from a desire to show that the life of their Lord in some places closely paralleled the life of Moses, why did they insert in their story the command of Christ to the disciples that they were not to speak of this event until after the Resurrection? More than that, Peter says that he actually *heard* this voice, and *saw* the Lord transfigured. If this story was a bare fiction, then Peter knew it was a fiction, and by his words he gave support to the lies of the Synoptic writers. We do not believe that anyone who could write such exalted paragraphs concerning sin, holiness, the blood of Christ, judgment to come, and the wrath of God, as Peter has done, would be guilty, at his advanced age, as one upon whom the Holy Spirit had descended at Pentecost, of conniving in any such a piece of fiction as this, and allowing his name to be attached to what he would then have known to be nothing but a deliberate lie. The whole thing is psychologically inconceivable.

Some have suggested that the whole narrative is to be considered as a myth, in which the incident is taken in connection with the subsequent conversation regarding Elijah, and to be regarded as originating at a later date. The mythical idea, however, has been abandoned during the last three decades of New Testament criticism, and defended by no worthy New Testament scholar today; it need not be given serious consideration in this brief chapter.

Some have attempted to make this story nothing but a dream of Peter's, but, as Godet asks, "Did the other two Apostles have the same dream at the same time, and would Jesus have attached such importance to a disciple's dream as to have strictly prohibited him from relating it until after His Resurrection from the dead?"<sup>12</sup>



There have been a number of other theories suggested from time to time, as, e.g., the idea of Drews, that the whole narrative is a strange combination of sun myths floating about during the time of our Lord, etc., etc.<sup>13</sup> To make out that these Galilean fishermen knew the details of Greek mythology more thoroughly than outstanding scholars have known the same details down to the middle of the nineteenth century, which minute details could only be discovered after a careful study of Greek literature, is to demand a miracle greater than the Transfiguration. The facts seem plain, even though we cannot fully *explain* what happened.

#### THE SUPERNATURALNESS OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

No other person in all history has been transfigured, and concerning no other person has a voice from heaven ever been heard to say, "This is my beloved Son—hear ye Him." If these things actually happened, Christ is none other than the Son of God; we cannot escape from that conclusion. The voice must be either the voice of God the Father, or the voice of Christ Himself, or the voice of an angel, or the voice of Satan, or the voice of one of the disciples. If it was the voice of Christ, then He performed an act of ventriloquism to deliberately deceive the disciples, and this is utterly contrary to everything we know of the Holy Son of God. Whatever we think of Jesus, every rational person knows that *He* would never stoop to a trick like that. It is impossible that the voice should be the voice of an angel, for no angel could say, unless he lied, that Christ was his begotten son, and if angels are unfallen angels, they do not lie. The voice could never have been the voice of Satan, because that is the one thing that Satan, during our Lord's life on earth, never wanted to admit, namely, that Christ was the Son of God. It is the last thing he would ever say. Certainly the disciples did not say this,

for they were so frightened, they hardly knew what to say. The only record that we have of any of them speaking is the record of Peter, and it would have been better if he had said nothing, for his words were foolish, needing to be rebuked by Christ.

Let it be repeated, if the record is true, and there is every reason for believing it to be true, and there is no reasonable explanation accounting for these things except on the basis that they actually took place, then the Transfiguration reveals Christ to be none other than the only Begotten Son of God.

No orator at the height of his greatest oration, no general of any army about to receive the sword from his defeated enemies, no traveler beholding for the first time the majesty of the Alps, or the dazzling beauties of the tropics, no young man ever walking to the altar of a church to be wedded to the one whom he deeply loves, no man at any time of history has ever been known to undergo such an experience of physical Transfiguration as Jesus underwent this day. It marks Christ off from all other beings of our race. I do not mean to be sarcastic, but I just wish that some of these scholars who make light of this event, and who deny its historicity, would take three companions whose testimony could be depended upon, up onto a high mountain, and be transfigured before them, and then have this experience to be followed by a voice from Heaven actually saying, "This is my Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased." When someone else has an experience like this, we can begin to discuss its "naturalness." Until they do, it remains strictly *a manifestation of the supernatural*.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRANSFIGURATION

While this volume is primarily an apologetic work, defending the supernaturalism of the four major events of our Lord's life which we are considering, yet, in the treat-



ment of the subject of the Transfiguration, we believe there is involved more or less the question of *why* such an event should have taken place in our Lord's life. To put it somewhat differently, most readers will at once ask the question: what ultimately was the purpose for Christ, and for the disciples, of such an experience as this? We believe that the words of the late Professor David Smith in his epochal, though, in places, perhaps inadequate work, *The Days of His Flesh*, has given us as fine a summary of this particular aspect of our Lord's Transfiguration as can be found in any modern volume devoted to the inexhaustible subject of our Lord's earthly life, and in concluding our study of the Transfiguration we believe we do well to bring these two significant paragraphs to the attention of our readers. They seem to form a natural and perfect conclusion to the discussion we have just been carrying on.

"The real import of this wondrous incident emerges only when it is recognised that, like the Lord's miracle of walking upon the Lake, it was an anticipation of the Resurrection. By the power of God the body of Jesus assumed for a season the conditions of the resurrection-life. It became, in the language of St. Paul, 'a spiritual body,' and He appeared to the three even as when He manifested Himself after He had risen from the dead on the road to Emmaus, in the room at Jerusalem, on the shore of the Lake. And the miracle had a twofold purpose. It was designed, in the first instance, to strengthen Jesus and nerve Him for the dread ordeal which awaited Him. It was as though the veil had been drawn aside and the eternal world for a little space disclosed to His view. It was like a vision of home to the exile, like a foretaste of rest to the weary traveller. He was granted a glimpse among the children of men, winning redemption for them, and an earnest likewise of the joy that was set before Him. From the vantage-ground of the Mount of Transfiguration He descried the consummation which awaited Him beyond the Hill of Calvary. Nor was that the only consolation which was vouchsafed to Him. His heart had been grieved by the dullness of the Twelve, the folly of the multitude, and the hostility of the rulers, and in that

transcendent hour it was revealed to Him how His work was viewed by God and the glorified saints. Though He stood alone on earth, misunderstood, forsaken, and persecuted, He had Heaven's sympathy and approval.

"And the Transfiguration had a purpose also in relation to the disciples. It was designed to reconcile them to the incredible and repulsive idea of Messiah's sufferings by revealing to them the glories that should follow. What did they hear as they listened to the converse betwixt those two glorified saints who bore the greatest names on Israel's roll of honour? They heard them talking of 'the decease,' or, as it is in Greek, 'the Exodus,' which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. In the judgment of Moses and Elijah that issue, which seemed to the disciples an intolerable ignominy and a crushing disaster, was a splendid triumph, like the mighty deliverance which God had wrought for Israel when He brought her by the hand of Moses out of the land of bondage and made her a free nation."<sup>14</sup>

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> A. B. Bruce: *The Training of the Twelve*, p. 190.

<sup>2</sup> William Ernest Beet: *The Transfiguration of Jesus*, London, 1905, p. 5. Dr. Guignebert, Professor of the History of Christianity in the Sorbonne, in his recent epochal, though distinctly rationalistic, and, in our mind, emphatically untruthful if not blasphemous work, *Jesus* (in the famous *History of Civilization* series), a work we shall have occasion to speak of further in the next chapter, in a text running well over 500 pages, does not give a single line to a discussion of this particular event in our Lord's life.

<sup>3</sup> A. S. Martin, art. "Transfiguration," in *Hastings' Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ii, 743.

<sup>4</sup> R. C. H. Lenski: *The Interpretation of St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels*, Columbus, Ohio, 1934, p. 228.

<sup>5</sup> G. Campbell Morgan: *The Crises of the Christ*, New York, 1903, pp. 227, 228.

<sup>6</sup> R. C. Trench: *Studies in the Gospels*, 1867, pp. 197, 198.

<sup>7</sup> R. C. Trench, *ibid.*, p. 199.

<sup>8</sup> A. B. Bruce, *ut supra*, pp. 194, 195.

<sup>9</sup> R. C. Trench, *ut supra*, pp. 206-208.



<sup>10</sup> A. S. Martin, *ut supra*, p. 743.

<sup>11</sup> David F. Strauss: *Life of Jesus*. Eng. trans., III, pp. 247, 248.

<sup>12</sup> F. Godet: *A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Eng. trans., New York, 1881, p. 275.

<sup>13</sup> This theory of Drews is fully discussed in Thomas James Thorburn: *The Mythical Interpretation of the Gospels*, New York, 1916, pp. 158, 159.

<sup>14</sup> David Smith: *The Days of His Flesh*, New York, London, 1907, pp. 273, 274. See also A. B. Bruce, *ut supra*, pp. 193, 194. In addition to the literature cited above, see, e.g., Alfred Ederheim: *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 8th ed., rev., Vol. II, 91-101; J. P. Lange: *The Life of the Lord Jesus Christ*, Eng. trans., Edinburgh, 1872. Vol. II, 324-334.

## THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

### SYNOPSIS

- I. The Acknowledged Importance of Christ's Resurrection.
  1. Even rationalists admit it is the very center and secret of the Christian faith.
  2. Christ's predictions concerning His Resurrection.
  3. The Gospel records of the Resurrection.
  4. The Resurrection the foundation of the earliest Christian preaching.
  5. The testimony of St. Paul.
- II. The Resurrection of Christ a Resurrection of Christ's Body or Not in Any Sense a Resurrection.
- III. Evidences of the Truth of the Resurrection.

There is no middle position possible—Christ did rise, or He did not.

  1. The empty tomb.
  2. The post-Resurrection appearances.
    - a. A list of these appearances.
    - b. Their variety.
    - c. Minute details that could not be the result of imagination.
    - d. The reasonableness and restraint of the record of the appearances during the forty days.
  3. The testimony of the guards.
  4. The changed apostles.
  5. The alleged "contradictions" in the Resurrection narratives.
- IV. Theories Proposed to Rationalistically Explain the New Testament Records of This Stupendous Event.
  1. The Resurrection of Christ was opposed from the first, by falsehood and corruption.
  2. The swoon theory—that Christ did not die.



3. The theory that Christ did die, but that His body was never placed in Joseph's tomb.
  4. The theory that the women on Easter morning went to the wrong tomb.
  5. The theory that the body was stolen from Joseph's tomb
    - a. by Joseph himself.
    - b. by the disciples.
    - c. by the Jews.
    - d. by the soldiers.
  6. The fraud theory.
  7. The vision theories.
  8. The "telegram" theory.
  9. The negative value of so many attempts to explain what happened, none of which win the general consent of those who refuse to believe in Christ's Resurrection.
  10. The will not to believe.
- V. The Resurrection Perfectly Harmonizes with Christ's Life and Character.
- VI. The Final Verdict.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE HISTORICAL REALITY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

THE most important rationalistic study of the life of Christ to appear in the last quarter of a century is the volume *Jesus*, by Ch. Guignebert, published in the famous *History of Civilization* series (appearing in an English translation in 1935). Dr. Guignebert is the Professor of History of Christianity in the Sorbonne, which, we would think, could be called the most important professorship in all of France as far as its influence on conceptions of Christian origins and the Christ of Christianity in France is concerned. Incidentally, Professor Guignebert happens to be an Honorary Associate of the Rationalist Press Association of Great Britain; strange company for a Professor of the History of Christianity in any university, for among other Honorary Associates are John Dewey, Albert Einstein, J. B. S. Haldane, Julian S. Huxley, Bertrand Russell, and H. G. Wells. Guignebert utterly repudiates the idea of Christ's Resurrection, as he absolutely repudiates all the miracles of the New Testament. More of this later. But at the very end of his book, he is forced to make the following confession: "There would have been no Christianity if the belief in the Resurrection had not been founded and systematized. . . . The whole of the soteriology and the essential teaching of Christianity rests on the belief of the Resurrection, and on the first page of any account of Christian dogma might be written as a motto Paul's declaration: 'And if Christ be not risen, then is our



preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.' From the strictly historical point of view, the importance of the belief in the Resurrection is scarcely less. . . . By means of that belief, faith in Jesus and in His mission became the fundamental element of a new religion which, after separating from, became the opponent of Judaism and set out to conquer the world."<sup>1</sup>

So the first great rationalistic interpreter of the New Testament in modern times, Strauss, frankly admitted that the Resurrection was "the Touchstone not of lives of Jesus only, but of Christianity itself," and is "decisive for the whole view of Christianity."<sup>2</sup>

#### CHRIST'S OWN PREDICTIONS OF HIS RESURRECTION

The Resurrection of our Lord was not something which accidentally took place at the end of his life, but an event to which He repeatedly made reference during the three years of his public ministry preceding his death. Early in his ministry, immediately after the cleansing of the temple, our Lord said to the Jews of Jerusalem, "Destroy this temple, and in three days, I will raise it up. . . . He spoke of the temple of His body" (John 2:19, 21). During the second period of His Galilean ministry, after the healing of the demoniac, He declared, "As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). Immediately following Peter's great confession, we read that "Jesus began to show unto His disciples how that . . . the third day He must be raised up" (Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22). This prophecy was repeated immediately after the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:23; Mark 9:31). Just before Passion Week, our Lord emphatically once again predicted that, on "the third day" He should be raised up (Matthew 20:19; Mark 10:34; Luke 18:33). Once during Passion Week,

following the Lord's supper, He revealed His unwavering faith in this stupendous miracle, speaking of events to take place, "after I am raised up" (Matthew 26:32; Mark 14:28).

### THE RECORDS OF THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES

All four of the Gospels conclude with this supernatural event in our Lord's life, climaxing in the Ascension. The burial of Christ is recorded in Matthew 27:57-66; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-56; John 19:38-42. The actual Resurrection itself is recorded in Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12; John 20:1-13. The appearances of our Lord during the forty days immediately following His Resurrection are recorded in Matthew 28:9-20; Mark 16:9-20; Luke 24:12-53; John 20:14-21, 25. As the four Gospels conclude with an account of Christ's appearances, so the book of Acts opens with a brief reference to these appearances (Acts 1:3-11). More space is devoted in the Gospels to an account of Christ's Resurrection than to any other one aspect of our Lord's entire life, except His trial and crucifixion. As to the historical value of these Gospel narratives, we will have more to say later.

### THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARLIEST PREACHING

All the preaching of the early church identified itself with the Resurrection fact. As Professor Shaw has well said, "So far from being a mere accessory or appendage to the Apostolic message, a detached event added on to the life and teaching of Jesus to assure the disciples of His survival of death and the truth of His claim, in it lay germinally and as in a kernel the whole Gospel they had to preach; so that the preaching of Christ is for the Apostles the preaching of His Resurrection, and their primary function is to be witnesses of the fact."<sup>3</sup> The



number of times the Resurrection is referred to in the book of Acts will amaze anyone who has not given this particular point serious consideration (see, e.g., 1:1-3, 22; 2:24, 30-33; 3:15, 26; 4:10, 33; 5:30; 10:40, 41; 13:23, 30, 31, 33, 37; 17:3, 18, 31; 26:22, 23).

We doubt if there would be any such a thing as preaching in the early church, if it were not that the disciples were energized by this profound conviction that they had such a message as the Resurrection of Christ to proclaim to the world. Paul himself said, early in his ministry, "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain" (I Cor. 15:14).

#### THE TESTIMONY OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

Within twenty years of our Lord's Resurrection, the Apostle Paul wrote his First Epistle to the Church at Corinth, and toward the end of this Epistle, in his famous fifteenth chapter, he supports his entire argument for our Resurrection upon what he believed was the indisputable fact of Christ's Resurrection, in the following powerful testimony, which rationalism has never been able to invalidate.

"For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of about five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the Apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time (I Cor. 15:3-8)."

Well has Professor Milligan said, "both in his addresses in the Acts, and in his own letters, the Apostle shows that faith in a risen and living Christ is the under current by the force of which he is irresistibly borne along, whatever at any particular moment are his feelings or purposes or aims. It is not conceivable

that so powerful an effect should have been produced upon him, had he not himself been thoroughly satisfied as to the fact to which alone it can be traced. It is certainly out of a conviction as clearly formed and as firmly held as human conviction can be that he speaks. Let us suppose for a moment that he was wrong, it would evidently have been a hopeless task to try to convince him that it was so. We may listen to him or not; his testimony will never change. All this is the more remarkable when we consider that St. Paul was thoroughly alive to the extraordinary nature of the fact, and that he gives his testimony as one who is aware that it needs confirmation by others, and is under a solemn sense of his own responsibility to be faithful. . . . Note especially his emphasis on the fact that of the five hundred brethren to whom he refers 'the greater part remain unto this present, but some have fallen asleep' and to the horror with which he shrinks from being found a false witness of God. . . . St. Paul so gives his testimony to the Resurrection of our Lord that the most skillful counsel in a modern court of law will scarcely venture to think that it would be in his power to shake it by any cross examination he could conduct were the Apostle now before him." <sup>4</sup>

Whatever be one's final conviction regarding the Resurrection of our Lord, it is admitted by everyone that such a supposed event is so interwoven with all the New Testament documents that to eliminate it from the Gospels, the Acts, and the Epistles, is to render the entire New Testament record hopelessly confused. It would be to deny not only certain words of our Lord in His teaching, but also to repudiate many accusations made against Him by His enemies; it would be to make the end of our Lord's life nothing but a tragedy. It would be to leave unexplained and unexplainable the formation of the Christian Church. It would be to leave us without dependable records of the early Apostolic messages. It would be to make the conversion and conviction of the Apostle Paul the greatest riddle of human history. Without the Resurrection, we do not know the ultimate end of Christ's life on earth; we do not know why the Apostles began to preach; we do not



know why the Apostle Paul became convinced of such a supernatural event; we do not know why the Sabbath day was changed; we do not know how the Christian Church came to be established. With the Resurrection admitted as a fact, the stupendous themes of the New Testament become reasonable, and its narratives logical. Without the Resurrection we have nothing but a tissue of dreams, ethics resting in air, truth proclaimed without evidence, and we remain of all men most miserable. Whatever ultimately may be thought of the reality or unreality of this particular event, at least it must be confessed that it is inextricably woven into the fabric of the New Testament welcoming the most careful investigation.

#### THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST A RESURRECTION OF CHRIST'S BODY

Before examining the evidence for our Lord's Resurrection, let it be clearly understood that by *resurrection* can be meant nothing else than a *resurrection of the body*. There is no such thing as the "resurrection of a spirit." Resurrection means being raised again. The spirit never has to be raised again from the grave, because it never enters the grave; a spirit can know no resurrection from the dead, because a spirit never dies! The New Testament continually insists that it was a *body* which was placed in the tomb, so it was a *body* which came forth from the tomb. As the Apostle Paul says, "He was buried, and He rose again the third day." That which rose again is that which was buried. A spirit is never buried. It is sheer nonsense to talk about believing in a *spiritual* resurrection of Christ. There is no such thing. If it were a spirit that was being raised, there would be no sense in insisting on the third day. A spirit could manifest itself at any time after death. Exactly what the nature of Christ's risen body was, it is not our place in this chapter to discuss, but as

Professor Orr well says, "though the conditions of existence of the body were, indeed, in some respects naturally altered, as befitted the new state on which it had entered, it was still a body which could be seen, touched, handled; which evinced its identity with the body that had been crucified, by the print of the nails and the spear-mark in the side"<sup>5</sup> (Luke 24:39, 40; John 20:24-28). Professor Kirsopp Lake, who absolutely denies the reality of Christ's Resurrection, is honest enough to admit that Paul "believed in the complete personal identity of that which rose with that which had died and been buried."<sup>6</sup>

#### EVIDENCES OF THE TRUTH OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

Throughout the history of the church, there have been many who, while not believing Christ to be the only Begotten Son of God have considered him the noblest, most wonderful and holy person who has ever lived on this earth; there have been many who, while not believing that the works of Christ are supernatural, have yet acknowledged that He had wonderful abilities for performing acts which men today seem not to be able to perform; there are many famous Jewish scholars who, while they do not believe Christ was a prophet come from God, yet acknowledge that His teachings are the loftiest that have ever escaped human lips. In fact, modernism itself may be called a middle-of-the-road position, not a repudiation of Christ, and yet not an acceptance of Him as the Son of God. When, however, it comes to the matter of the Resurrection, there is no middle ground to take. Either Christ rose from the dead, or He did not rise from the dead. "A conviction that a particular person had risen again, when He had *not*, is simply false, however it may have been produced. . . . The Resurrection is either a fact in itself or it is a fiction—it matters not whether designed or undesigned—on which no belief can be founded. If the Resur-



rection be not true, then death still remains the great conqueror."<sup>7</sup>

It will now be our privilege, and really our duty, to examine the evidence that we have, to see if this thing is true or not. We believe the evidence for our Lord's Resurrection may be divided into five great classes: the evidence of the empty tomb, the evidence of the post-Resurrection appearances, the testimony of the guards, the change in the Apostles, and the primitive faith of the Church.

### THE EVIDENCE OF THE EMPTY TOMB

All four Gospels record the burial of our Lord in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, located in the garden "in the place where He was crucified" (John 19:41). It would be well to refresh our memories by reading over just one of these accounts. "When the even was come, there came a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: He went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered. And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre, and departed. And there was Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, sitting over against the sepulchre" (Matthew 27:57-61).

All four Gospels record that on Sunday morning, which we now speak of as "the Lord's day," or "the first day of the week," which we have since called Easter morning, immediately following the Jewish Sabbath, certain women came to the tomb "to see the sepulchre" (Matthew 28:1), bringing spices "that they might come and anoint Him" (Mark 16:1). All the accounts (except Matthew's) tell us that when they came to the tomb, debating as they walked, how they would ever get the great stone rolled away, so that they might enter in to anoint the body of their Lord,

they "found the stone rolled away from the tomb" (Luke 24:2). Matthew says that an angel informed them, "He is not here . . . Come see the place where the Lord lay." The narrative here does not say that they did see the place, but it is presumed that they did. An earlier record says that, "entering into the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, arrayed in a white robe," who likewise said, "He is risen; He is not here; behold the place where they laid Him." Luke's record reads, "and they entered in and found not the body of the Lord Jesus." John tells us that Mary Magdalene, after beholding the empty tomb, ran back and reported to Simon Peter and the Apostle John, "they have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid Him." The narrative goes on to tell us how Peter and John also came to the tomb, saw it empty, the linen clothes lying in their place, "and the napkin that was upon His head, not lying with the linen clothes but rolled up in a place by itself." In this all students of the New Testament are in agreement,—the tomb was empty. "There is not a hint anywhere that the fact of the empty tomb was ever questioned by either friend or foe."<sup>8</sup>

The question is at once forced upon us, how did the tomb become empty? The tomb was either deprived of the body which it held by a miraculous Resurrection of that body, or it was robbed of the body which was reverently placed there. Regarding the theories which have been offered to explain the empty tomb, we will have more to say later. All we are doing now is to simply present the historical evidence as it appears in these precious documents.

#### THE POST-RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

It is generally conceived that the New Testament records ten appearances of our Lord between the time of His Resurrection on Easter morning and His Ascension forty



days later, in addition to His later appearance to the Apostle Paul on the Damascus road. It will be best for us to enumerate these appearances that the evidence may be seen in its full significance.

(1) To certain women as they returned from the sepulchre, after having seen the angel who told them Christ had arisen (Matt. 28:1-10).

(2) To Mary Magdalene at the sepulchre, probably upon her second visit to it that morning (John 20:11-18; Mark 16:9-11).

(3) To the Apostle Peter, before the evening of the day of the Resurrection, but under circumstances of which we have no details (Luke 24:34; I Cor. 15:5).

(4) To the two disciples, Cleopas and another, on the way to Emmaus, on the afternoon of Easter (Mark 16:12, 13; Luke 24:13-35).

(5) To the ten Apostles, Thomas being absent, together with others whose names are not given, assembled together on the evening of Easter day at their evening meal (Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:36-40; John 20:19-23; I Cor. 15:5).

(6) One week later, to all the eleven Apostles, probably in the same place as the preceding appearance (John 20:26-28).

(7) To several of the disciples at the sea of Galilee, while they were fishing, the exact time undesignated (John 21:1-23).

(8) To the Apostles, and above five hundred brethren, at once, on an appointed mountain in Galilee (Matt. 28:16-20; I Cor. 15:6).

(9) To James, under circumstances of which we have no information (I Cor. 15:7).

(10) To the Apostles at Jerusalem, immediately before the Ascension, on the Mt. of Olives (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:3-8).<sup>9</sup>

A number of things should be noted about these appearances. In the first place, there is a considerable variety

of circumstances attending these ten manifestations. It was not to one person, or one group of persons, that He revealed Himself at different times, nor was it to the same type of persons that He revealed Himself each time. There are certain women, there are two disciples on the way to Emmaus, there are Apostles gathered together in an upper room, there are five hundred brethren meeting together at once. What a difference between such people as Mary Magdalene, Peter, James, John, and Thomas! "Nor were the feelings of these different groups, at the instant when the manifestations were made to them, less various than the groups themselves: the women departing quickly from the sepulchre, with fear and great joy; Mary Magdalene standing without the sepulchre weeping; the two disciples talking in sadness of all the things which had happened; the Apostles assembled with shut doors for fear of the Jews; the brethren in Galilee gathered together in obedience to Christ's command; the seven engaged in their old occupation as fishermen; the eleven on the Mt. of Olives rejoicing in the presence of their Lord with the full assurance that it was indeed Himself."<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, "We ought not to forget that the evidence was published to the world on the very spot *where* and at the very time *when* the event was said to have happened and that no one was able to controvert it. . . . At a moment when it was yet possible to test every incident, to examine every witness, and to expose every trace of fraud, the Apostles openly and unhesitatingly proclaimed the fact."<sup>11</sup>

Many have remarked on the remarkable naturalness of Christ during all these appearances. "Were these appearances legends that had arisen from the visions of enthusiasts they would certainly have represented the Lord quite differently, probably in all the blaze of heavenly glory, as might be expected according to Daniel 7:13, 14; 10:5, 6. But in these accounts, the risen Christ, with all His dignity, appears in such unpretending humanity, in



such a natural state of transition between human lowliness and divine glory that this utter absence of extravagance is a striking testimony to the truth of that which is thus related." <sup>12</sup>

There is no attempt in any of the records to describe how the Lord appeared. In fact, as He walks on the Emmaus road, He is simply recognized as a fellow-citizen of Israel. The picture of the Lord actually preparing breakfast on the shore of the sea of Galilee for the cold and fatigued disciples, is so natural and so beautiful as to be beyond all possibility of being thought the product of any imagination, no matter how reverent that imagination might be. Breaking bread with the disciples on the Emmaus road, and eating fish at the sea of Galilee, are incidents which no one would ever have thought of placing in these post-Resurrection narratives, unless they rested solidly on fact. Incidentally, and I would not want to press this point, I must say that after nearly twenty-five years of preaching from and teaching the word of God, I can never begin to read any of these Resurrection narratives, and then undertake to study them, and to expound them, without being overwhelmed with their exquisite beauty, with their indefinable loveliness, with their artless simplicity, and with the marvelous, helpful, strengthening, hope-begetting sentences which are placed on the lips of our Lord as He mingles among those who loved and adored Him.

#### THE TESTIMONY OF THE GUARDS

At the end of Matthew's account of the events of Easter day, there is a very remarkable postscript, which to me is one of the most fascinating paragraphs in all the New Testament, and which, as far as I have read in the literature where one would expect these verses to be considered, has not been given the attention which it deserves. The paragraph reads as follows: "Now when they were go-

ing, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day" (Matt. 28:11-15). A number of very interesting points are to be elicited from these few lines. To begin with, we have here a remarkable unintended testimony to the fact that Joseph's tomb was empty. The guards do not know *how* the body of Christ ever got out of the tomb, which would seem to absolutely necessitate a miraculous and silent exit, for we can hardly believe that all the guards were asleep, and, even if they were, a normal exit from the tomb, or an act of robbery, would have instantly awakened them, unless they had been drugged, and for this there is not the slightest bit of evidence. Is there not also something else here, namely that the chief priests and elders were themselves convinced that the tomb was empty? If they had had any doubt of it, they would have immediately gone out to investigate this for themselves, which is exactly what they did not do. What is more, they do not seem to have set on foot any investigation to discover where the body of Christ might be, or to apprehend those, who, if it was stolen, had taken the body away. There is here also something most despicable. These soldiers are actually bribed, *by the religious leaders of Israel*, to tell a lie regarding the Lord Jesus Christ, and to tell a lie as to their own experiences the preceding night, and to involve in this lie the innocent disciples, accusing them of actual grave-robbery. Furthermore, these religious leaders promised that if the governor should hear anything of this, they would take care of him, either probably by more money, or by



threatening him with some exposure or opposition on the part of the Jews. Thus the first attempt to explain the Resurrection on the part of those who *would* not believe involved falsehood and corruption! This is a miserable way to undertake a conflict with truth, but it has characterized the words and acts and accusations of millions of the opponents of our faith in every age. I would not be a bit surprised if these chief priests and elders lost some sleep that night, knowing that something had happened beyond their control, which would later result in the exposure of their own crime in crucifying Jesus, and the ultimate doom of their city.

#### THE CHANGE IN THE APOSTLES

If one should draw up a complete record of the actions and thoughts and words, as far as known, of the eleven Apostles from Sunday of Passion Week, through the following Sunday evening, the day of our Lord's Resurrection, and then have placed in one's hands without names being mentioned, a similarly complete record, as far as evidence allowed, of the eleven men who beheld and heard the Lord during the forty days before His Ascension, a record covering the wonderful opening years of the Christian Church, one would never recognize the depressed and bewildered characters of the early record, as the bold, courageous, Gospel-proclaiming, powerfully persuaded, characters of the second narrative. "Those who when Christ was yet with them wavered in spite of their love for Him, mistook His words, misunderstood His purpose, forsook Him at His Passion, after a brief interval court danger in the service of a Master no longer present, proclaim with unfaltering zeal a message hitherto unheard, build up a society in faith on His Name, extend to Samaritans and Gentiles the blessings which were promised to the people of God. However we explain it the change is complete and certain. Their whole moral nature was transformed. As far as we can see

there was no spring of hope within them which could have had such an issue. The anticipations which they shared with their countrymen, and those which the immediate presence of Christ had awakened, were dissipated by His death. Whatever new impulse moved and animated them must have been from without, clear, and powerful. It must have been clear, to make itself felt to men who were in no way predisposed to yield to it: powerful, to remould once and for ever their notions of the work of Messiah. The Resurrection satisfies both conditions. As a fact with which the disciples were familiarised by repeated proofs it was capable of removing each lingering doubt: as a Revelation of which the meaning was finally made known by the withdrawal of Christ from the earth, it opened a new region and form of life, the apprehension of which would necessarily influence all their interpretations of the Divine promises. If the crucified Lord did rise again, we can point to effects which answer completely to what we may suppose to have been the working of the stupendous miracle on those who were the first witnesses of it: if He did not, to what must we look for an explanation of phenomena for which the Resurrection is no more than an adequate cause?"<sup>18</sup> Rationalists have never satisfactorily answered that question.

Well has Professor Fairburn said, "We know what the fishermen on our own coasts are capable of; we know what these Galilean fishermen have achieved. In their original state the latter had a narrower range of ideas, more limited ambitions, grosser notions of religion, of God and man, than even the former; yet these Galileans were so transformed and inspired as to conceive and proceed to realize a scheme of conquest far sublimer than had ever dawned on the mind of Alexander or Caesar. And what caused the change? If they themselves are to be believed, the Resurrection and the ideas it worked in them. If they had created the faith, they had remained unchanged. If it created them, the change is explicable and finds an adequate cause. Without



it, they remain the greatest leaders in history; with it, they and their achievements become alike natural. The Resurrection is a sufficient reason for the men; but without it, the men are no sufficient reason for Christianity." <sup>14</sup>

#### A WORD ABOUT "CONTRADICTIONS" IN THE RESURRECTION STORIES

If the four Gospel narratives of the events connected with our Lord's resurrection are placed in parallel columns, a number of differences will at once be discovered. But this seems ultimately to strengthen one's conviction in the validity of these records, rather than weaken it. If all the narratives gave exactly the same details, and spoke of exactly the same episodes, no more and no less, we would think that all four narratives had been copied from some one original source. But the very contrary is the case. No one of the Gospels gives all the details of the events, even of Easter Sunday. Only Luke gives a detailed account of the walk to Emmaus; only Matthew gives a record of the first appearance to the women; Matthew and Luke never mention the appearance to Mary Magdalene; only St. John tells us of the second appearance to the eleven Apostles with Thomas absent; he also is the only one who gives the beautiful picture of the later appearance on the sea of Galilee. Only Matthew records the appearance to a great multitude of brethren, to which St. Paul refers in I Cor. 15:6. None of the four evangelists gives us any details regarding the private appearance to James, and only Luke, among the four, even refers to Christ's private appearance to P  ter on the day of the Resurrection. Furthermore, we must remember that "no two men see the same thing exactly in the same way, or receive from it precisely similar impressions. If they are faithful to themselves, they must differ from one another, and it is the province of the impartial judge to disentangle different statements, and to

determine whether the fact as a whole or how much of it, is true. . . . Statements directly and positively contradictory as to the main point at issue would, undoubtedly, justify our rejecting it; but where the main point is admitted by every witness, slighter divisions are not only perfectly consistent with its truth, but are of the utmost importance for establishing it." <sup>15</sup>

In the great fundamental facts of our Lord's Resurrection, all the narratives are in absolute agreement, namely, that Christ's body was placed in a tomb of Joseph of Arimathea on Friday afternoon; that this tomb was sealed with a great stone, and that before it guards were set to keep it from violation; that on Easter morning, when women came to the tomb, they found the stone rolled away and the body gone; that on Easter morning these early visitors were told by an angel that the Lord had risen indeed; that during the day our Lord appeared at least on five different occasions; that in all cases of Christ's appearances during these forty days, He showed Himself only to believers; that He showed Himself in a true body, His person identical with the person of the Lord with whom these disciples had walked for three years; that during these days He gave to His disciples the great commission to evangelize the world; that all these experiences abruptly terminated forty days after the Resurrection, when our Lord was taken up from their midst, as they beheld Him, and received into heaven. In these fundamental truths, there are absolutely no contradictions. The so-called variations in the narratives are only the details which were most vividly impressed on one mind or another of the witnesses of our Lord's Resurrection, or on the mind of the writers of these four respective Gospels. The closest, most critical, examination of these narratives throughout the ages, never has destroyed and can never destroy their powerful testimony to the truth that Christ did rise from the dead on the third day, and was seen of many.



THEORIES THAT HAVE BEEN PROPOSED TO EXPLAIN THE  
NEW TESTAMENT STORY OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

In considering the varied, and often fantastic, theories that have been proposed from time to time to rationalistically explain away what the New Testament sets forth as a stupendous miracle, the Resurrection of our Lord, the author would like to make a statement that he has not seen emphasized in any book on the Resurrection that has come to his hand, namely, that from the very beginning of Christ's work on earth, and throughout the New Testament, the Resurrection of Christ was bitterly and continually opposed. When the chief priests and Pharisees said to Pilate on Saturday of Passion Week, "Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first" (Matt. 27:63, 64), they were, even before Christ rose from the dead, determined that such an event *must* not occur. They did not want Him to rise from the dead, and they made every possible provision that He shouldn't rise from the dead. This is not the way men act who are seeking for the truth. On Sunday, as we have already remarked, when the Sanhedrin gave money to the soldiers, and told them to lie about what had happened, they gave added testimony that, though they were the religious leaders of the Jewish people, they were not seeking the truth. They did not want the truth. One thing only they did want, to keep people from believing that Jesus had risen from the dead. The church has always had to contend with people like that, some of them in their own ranks, who do everything they can to keep people from knowing the truth. Shortly after the church began its glorious career, we read that the priests, the rulers of the temple, and the Sadducees,

were "grieved that they (the disciples) taught the people, and preached through Jesus the Resurrection from the dead," manifesting their hatred of the truth by throwing the Apostles into prison (Acts 4:1-22).

Years later, when Paul was in Athens, he preached unto the philosophers, gathered together to hear new things, "Jesus and the Resurrection," but at the end of his great sermon which he delivered on Mars Hill, we are told that "when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked; and others said, we will hear thee again on this matter" (Acts 17:18, 32). Some years after this, when Paul was defending himself before the Sanhedrin, and declared that he had been called in question regarding "the hope and resurrection of the dead," a dissension arose between the Pharisees and Sadducees, dividing the multitude, "for the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection" (Acts 23:6-9). When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he could say that there are "some among you who say there is no resurrection of the dead" (I Cor. 15:12), and the entire context implies that Paul was here emphatically speaking of the divine Resurrection of the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 15:12; see also II Tim. 2:18).

To sum up what we have been considering, we discover that religious leaders in the New Testament did everything they could to keep Christ from rising from the dead; when this failed, they did everything they could to mislead the people regarding the truth of Christ's Resurrection. To support their lies, especially regarding how the tomb became empty, they bribed men. The same religious leaders were made angry because the Resurrection was preached by the Apostles, and imprisoned those so engaged; far away from Jerusalem, in the university city of the world, we find the Athenians, and then, in another city of a different kind, Corinth, we find the Corinthians, absolutely prejudiced against the whole idea of the Resurrection, whatever the evidence might be. Is it not true that, in the Gospels and in



the book of Acts, those who are seen to take a deliberate stand against the Resurrection of Christ make no effort to investigate the evidence for themselves, and never ask the disciples to present evidence to support what they are preaching? The more one looks into the New Testament opposition to the truth of Christ's Resurrection, the more one sees how it is but a prophecy of the antagonism against the same truth in our modern day.

### THE SWOON THEORY

All theories which have been proposed to explain the apostolic faith in the Resurrection of Christ, and in the disappearance of Christ's body, admit that our Lord actually died, i.e., all theories but one. Some have dared to propose that our Lord never did die on the cross, but that He only *swooned* away, and, though He was placed in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, He was not dead. Those who hold this theory are more or less compelled to supplement it by saying that Christ came out of the tomb by His own strength, after recovering from this swoon state. Even Strauss, however, who did not at all believe in the Resurrection of Christ, repudiated such a fanciful idea as this with scorn. His words are famous, and worth repeating: "It is impossible that one who had just come forth from the grave half dead, who crept about weak and ill, who stood in need of medical treatment, of bandaging, strengthening, and tender care, and who at last succumbed to suffering, could ever have given to the disciples that impression that He was a conqueror over death and the grave,—that He was the Prince of Life,—which lay at the bottom of their future ministry. Such a resuscitation could only have weakened the impression which He had made upon them in life and in death,—or at the most could have given it an elegiac voice,—but could by no possibility have changed their sorrow into enthusiasm, or elevated their reverence into worship." <sup>16</sup>

There are many other objections to the theory which need only to be mentioned, the main one being, if Christ did not die at this time, then when did He die, and under what circumstances? Furthermore, as Professor Milligan has well said, "When the first fears of the disciples were dispelled, it was one of joy, of boldness, and of enthusiasm; we see none of those feelings of pity, of sympathy with suffering, of desire to render help, that must have been called forth by the appearance of a person who had swooned away through weariness and agony, who had continued in unconsciousness from Friday afternoon to a Sunday morning, and who was now only in the first moments of recovery."<sup>17</sup>

#### THE THEORY THAT CHRIST'S BODY WAS NEVER PLACED IN JOSEPH'S TOMB

Guignebert, in his rationalistic study of Christ to which we have already referred, confesses, "the truth is that we do not know, and in all probability the disciples knew no better, where the body of Jesus had been thrown after it had been removed from the cross, probably by the executioners. It is more likely to have been cast into the *pit* for the executed than laid in a *new tomb*."<sup>18</sup>

We must say, and we believe in saying it that all of our readers will be inclined to agree with us, whatever their belief about the Resurrection of Christ, that here is the kind of historical writing that ought to be designated as "mythological." No matter how great Professor Guignebert's learning may be, and no matter how high a position he might hold in the academic circles of France, when he makes a statement like this, *which cannot be supported by the slightest particle of evidence from the New Testament documents* (nor from any other documents which anyone knows about), he only reveals his own determination to strip the career of Christ of all of its supernatural elements, even if it necessitates manufacturing conclusions which are ut-



terly, absolutely unsupported by any testimony. Professor Guignebert is not alone in offering such a ridiculous explanation, but here is following Strauss, Reville, and a few others. A theory that has no evidence for its support need not be given any further consideration.

#### THE THEORY THAT THE WOMEN CAME TO THE WRONG TOMB

It has been held by some scholars that the women on Easter morning came to the wrong tomb. The latest scholar of outstanding importance to adopt this theory, I believe, is Professor Kirsopp Lake, who says, "The women came in the early morning to a tomb which they thought was the one in which they had seen the Lord buried. They expected to find a closed tomb but they found an open one; and a young man, who was in the entrance, guessing their errand, tried to tell them that they had made a mistake in the place. 'He is not here,' said he; 'see the place where they laid Him,' and probably pointed to the next tomb. But the women were frightened at the detection of their error, and fled, only imperfectly, or not at all, understanding what they heard. It was only later on, when they knew that the Lord had risen (from visions of the disciples in Galilee), and—on their view—that His tomb must be empty, that they came to believe that the young man was something more than they had seen; that he was not telling them of their mistake, but announcing the Resurrection and that his intention was to give them a message for the disciples." <sup>19</sup>

Like the theory that states Christ's body never was placed in the tomb, this is without any evidence whatever. In fact, even as we read the words of Professor Lake, it seems like following a narrative of Greek mythology, and that is not the way the New Testament records impress anyone. Furthermore, as many have pointed out, what was this young man doing at the wrong tomb? The appearance

of a young man or an angel at the real tomb of Joseph of Arimathea is understandable, but how did the young man know that just at that time some women would be coming to this *wrong* tomb, and that he should be there to direct them to the right one? If the women made a mistake in coming to the wrong tomb, are we to believe that when they reported what they had seen to Peter and John, these two disciples also came to the same wrong tomb? And then "are we also to assume that the Sanhedrin, which had buried this crucified one, instead of leaving his burial, as was the custom, to anybody who cared to undertake it, was so sympathetic that its weeping emissaries entirely forget where they had laid the body of the pretended Messiah?"<sup>20</sup>

Finally, it must never be forgotten that our Lord was not buried in an ordinary cemetery, where a great many other tombs were in close proximity, but He was buried in a private tomb, in a private burying ground. If you or I had buried our dearest loved one on a Friday afternoon, do you think that we would forget by Sunday morning the location of the body which we had placed away? The whole thing is only a revelation of the extreme ends to which some men are willing to go in their attempts to get rid of this fact of Christ's Resurrection.

#### THE THEORY THAT THE BODY WAS STOLEN FROM JOSEPH'S TOMB

As almost all students of this problem, with a few rare exceptions, believe that Christ truly died, so the greater majority of those who believe that Christ actually expired on the cross, admit also, because the evidence is so clear and decisive, that the body of Christ was placed in the tomb. They go even further, and admit, as we have seen above, that on Easter morning the body was not found in the tomb. This appears to be the greatest problem for rationalists to solve, among all the problems relating to our



Lord's Resurrection, namely, *what became of the body of the Lord Jesus?* It *was* in the tomb on Friday afternoon; it *was not* in the tomb on Sunday morning. Only four theories have ever been proposed, and it would seem only four could be proposed. Some say the body was removed by Joseph himself. This is the theory which has been adopted by the great Jewish scholar, Professor Joseph Klausner, of the National Hebrew University in Jerusalem, in his epochal work, *Jesus of Nazareth*. "We must assume that the owner of the tomb, Joseph of Arimathea, thought it unfitting that one who had been crucified should remain in his own ancestral tomb. Matthew only tells us that the tomb was new, hewn out of the rock, especially for Jesus, the Messiah. Joseph of Arimathea, therefore, secretly removed the body at the close of Sabbath, and buried it in an unknown grave; and since he was, according to the Gospels, 'one of the disciples of Jesus,' or 'one who was looking for the Kingdom of God,' there was some measure of truth in the report spread by the Jews, though it was, in the main, only the malicious invention of enemies unable to explain the 'miracle.' " <sup>21</sup>

As Professor Orr remarks, with a sarcasm very rare in his works, "This interesting little deception of Joseph, so likely in a good man, and first brought to light in these last years, successfully took in the whole Christian Church, and, combined with imaginary appearances, created its faith in the Resurrection!" <sup>22</sup>

The fact that Joseph was a Jew would make the handling of this body prohibitive; his life-long honesty would certainly never allow him to *deceive* the disciples; the eleven disciples, not expecting Christ to rise from the dead, would have to have a great deal more evidence than the empty tomb to convince them of a real Resurrection; we cannot conceive eleven men preaching with tremendous power, and earnestness, and marvelous results, for the next forty or fifty years, such a revolutionary doctrine as the Resurrec-

tion of the Lord Jesus Christ, when all they had was a knowledge that at least the body was gone. They were certainly bright enough to realize, as time went on, that a trick might have been played on them by others. The empty tomb did have a tremendous impression on the Apostles, but they were only able to understand the meaning of the empty tomb when they actually saw the Lord standing before them in His post-Resurrection appearances.

Some have dared to say that the Apostles themselves removed the body of the Lord Jesus, though there is, of course, no more evidence for this than for the other fanciful theories we have been enumerating. This was the proposed explanation of the empty tomb which first came to the minds of the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem, when they bribed the soldiers and commanded them to say, "His disciples came by night, and stole Him away while He slept." It was one of the earliest theories used by the pagan opponents of our Lord's Resurrection, e.g., Celsus. But, to quote once again from Professor Milligan's own excellent work on the Resurrection, "By whomsoever anticipated or urged, a more incredible supposition could not be made. To imagine that the disciples of our Lord, with a burden of this kind upon their consciences, could have gone out into the world as they did,—could have preached a kingdom of truth and righteousness as the one great effort of their lives,—and that for the sake of that kingdom they could have suffered, even unto death,—is to imagine one of those moral impossibilities which may be accepted for a moment when men are hard pressed in controversy, but which, in the cool hour of reflection, is at once dismissed. It is not necessary to discuss this theory. It has been abandoned by every inquirer to whom a moment's attention is due."<sup>23</sup>

These theories not only do not satisfy you and me, but they have failed to satisfy a great many others who yet refuse to believe in our Lord's Resurrection, so other theories have had to be proposed. One is that it was the soldiers



themselves, set to guard the tomb, who took the body away. Not only is there no evidence for this, not the slightest, but there could be no reason why the soldiers should do such a thing. They certainly were not asked to do it by the chief priests and elders, for it was they, later, who bribed them to say the disciples had stolen the body. We simply cannot believe it would be the disciples who made arrangements with the soldiers to steal the body, because fundamentally they were honest men, and they would not stoop to such a deception. They were not expecting the Lord to rise from the dead; why should they attempt to produce false evidence that He had risen? Furthermore, it was not many days before the Apostle Peter was preaching with great power in the city of Jerusalem that Christ had risen from the dead. The whole career of Peter, from Easter Day until his martyrdom, contradicts any theory that suggests that he, together with the other disciples, should have persuaded the Roman soldiers to execute such a trick as this. They would not have been bribed by the Jews to steal the body, because it was the Jews who put these soldiers there to see that the body was not carried out of the tomb. They would never have done it of their own accord, because they were under command to watch the tomb, and the penalty for doing what they are supposed to have done, to steal the body, would have been death, and they knew it.

Finally, and only finally because there are no other theories that could be thought of, some have suggested that the Jews themselves stole the body. Utterly impossible, as any person, free from prejudice in the matter, would at once admit. It was they who were so eager that the tomb should be sealed and guarded, that this man, whom they called a deceiver, should not rise from the dead. Moreover, as many have remarked, if they had secretly possessed Christ's body, then on the day of Pentecost, when Peter threw the whole city of Jerusalem into almost an uproar, by preaching Christ's Resurrection, all they needed to do would be to

wheel in the corpse of Jesus and forever put an end to the preaching of the Resurrection. How glad they would have been to do it! The wealth of Jerusalem would not have been too great a price to pay for such evidence as this, if it could have been secured. But the body never was produced, and the preaching went on, year after year, with persecution, yes, arousing hatred, yes, ultimately ending in prison for many of the Apostles, yes,—but never contradicted with genuine evidence. The preaching of the Resurrection could be bitterly opposed, but the fact of the Resurrection could never be disproved by evidence acceptable to reasonable men of that day.

### THE FRAUD THEORY

From time to time, a few desperate critics have suggested that the entire story of Christ's Resurrection was a fraud, conceived by and recorded by the Apostles, so that the prophecies of Christ that He would arise from the dead on the third day, should appear to have been fulfilled. The character of the Apostles is answer enough to such a theory as this. What is more, they did not have the imagination and the literary skill (and nobody else ever has had) to produce out of their imaginations such an exquisite, beautiful, radiant, natural narrative, such as they have given us in the four Gospels, standing the sharpest, severest criticism of the keenest minds of every age. What they wrote must have been a record of fact, not a story arising from their wicked determination to produce a stupendous lie. Even Klausner, from whom we have recently quoted, frankly admits, referring to this very theory, that "*Deliberate imposture* (italics his) is not the substance out of which the religion of millions of mankind is created."<sup>24</sup> Bishop Headlam's brief paragraph on this particular theory rightly ends with a short sentence of seven words, "There are some things which are impossible."<sup>25</sup>



## THE VISION THEORIES

The most important, and the most generally received explanation of the Resurrection narratives, and of the faith of the Apostles, by those who do not believe Christ rose from the dead, is the theory that these early Christians beheld visions of a risen Lord, and were truly convinced that Christ had risen from the dead. Not only do rationalists propose such a theory, but a great many men who seem to have more or less reverence for the Lord Jesus have accepted it, especially during the last century. It will need more consideration than any other theory which we discuss. First, perhaps, we should carefully read Professor Klausner's statement of the vision theory, which appears to be believed by him. "Here again, it is impossible to suppose that there was any conscious deception: the nineteen hundred years' faith of millions is not founded on deception. There can be no question but that some of the ardent Galilaeans saw their Lord and Messiah in a vision. That the vision was spiritual and not material is evident from the way Paul compares his own vision with those seen by Peter and James and the other Apostles. As to his own vision we know from the description in the Acts of the Apostles and from his own account that what he saw was no vision of flesh and blood but a vision 'born of the light,' 'a heavenly vision, in which God had revealed in me His Son.' Consequently, the vision seen by the disciples, a vision which Paul deliberately compares with His own, was a spiritual vision and no more. This vision became the basis of Christianity: it was treated as faithful proof of the Resurrection of Jesus, of His Messiahship, and of the near approach of the kingdom of heaven. But for this vision the memory of Jesus might have been wholly forgotten or preserved only in a collection of lofty ethical precepts and miracle stories. Could the bulk of the Jewish nation found its belief on such a cornerstone?" <sup>26</sup>

Visions, first, it should be remembered, come to those who expect them, in whose minds already some of the characteristics of the vision seen are more or less active. But the disciples had no idea at all that Christ was to rise from the dead. In fact, they had no confidence at all that Christ would rise from the dead. Indeed, it was with difficulty that they believed that He had risen, when the evidence was before them.

A vision is generally received by one person at a time. There is no such thing as a vision appearing to a crowd. We could believe that the women at the tomb, somewhat excited and bewildered, would be subject to such an experience, but what about hard-headed Peter, and doubting Thomas, and then what about the five hundred brethren to whom Jesus appeared at one time? This is not the way visions are experienced by people in any age. Moreover, as Professor LaTouche has well said, "the principle conditions of vision-seeing are time for the visions to arise, and a state of mind, ecstatic and unbalanced, which is favorable to the adoption of convictions without critical examination. Neither of these conditions existed in the case of the disciples. The Resurrection took place on the third day after the crucifixion, and all the appearances, with one exception, were completed within forty days. The disciples were depressed and despairing, never dreaming that they would again see those sacred features, or hear those well-beloved tones on this side of the grave; and, finally, when a great number of them were gathered together, they saw the Lord. Nothing is more remarkable in the whole history of Christianity than the dull perception of the disciples; they persisted in their unspiritual and material conceptions of the Kingdom of God even after the Resurrection was an accomplished fact; and they were sufficiently unexpectant, after they had heard of four distinct appearances of the risen Lord, to be terrified when He appeared to them on that first Easter evening, and attempted at first to account



for the phenomena by this very theory of visions, or hallucination, for they cried out, thinking that He was a spirit! This fact, that the ghost theory occurred to them, and that they tried to explain some of their earlier experiences by it, is a valuable testimony to the normal state of their minds when they saw the Lord, and ought to commend their witness to those who are still attempting to account for the appearances by this theory."<sup>27</sup>

But this is not all that there is to say about this widely accepted theory. The questions raised by Dr. John McNaugher are definitely to the point, and clearly indicate how unfounded, after all, the theory is seen to be when carefully considered. "If the post-mortem appearances of Jesus were just visions, why did they end so suddenly, all lying within six weeks? What cured these visionaries of their hallucinations so speedily and cured them simultaneously? How did flurried fanaticism yield so quickly to sobriety? Self-generated visions tend to become exuberant, tend to multiply. Phantasmal appearances ought to have intensified the emotional excitement from which they sprang, and thus ought to have continued as long as the distempered, diseased minds of the disciples could have furnished soil for such a crop of illusions. But within forty days the appearances ceased abruptly and permanently. The Vision theory provides no explanation of this fact."<sup>28</sup>

The concluding sentences of Professor Milligan, one of the great scholars of the last generation, after a long discussion of this Vision theory, can be profitably quoted as we, too, bring our discussion of this particular theory to a conclusion. "Of these objections, the Vision theory is undoubtedly the most formidable; but it, as well as the others that have been mentioned, fails to satisfy the indispensable conditions of inquiry. It also, therefore, must be rejected and we have no legitimate resource but to acknowledge the fact. We may be thankful that it should be so. We may believe that the Church of Christ has not grounded her life

and hope for eighteen centuries upon a delusion; and, in the face of either denial or scorn, we may assert that our words are those of truth and soberness, when we proclaim that He who died upon the cross rose on the third morning from the grave." <sup>29</sup>

### THE TELEGRAM THEORY

We have one more theory to consider, and this one of the strangest that has ever been devised, that which has been called the "Telegram" theory, the latest advocate of which is no less a scholar than the late Canon Streeter, recognized as probably the greatest authority of our generation on the critical problems of the Gospels. This really assumes that the ascended Lord, i.e., ascended in His Spirit, not (in such a theory) of course in His body, *telegraphed* back (if we may use the phrase) pictures of Himself to the minds of the Apostles in such a vivid way that they actually were led to believe they had seen the risen Lord in their midst. Just how any true scholar can ever consider such a fantastic theory as this, we do not quite know. For one thing, it is more of a manifestation of supernatural revelation than even the Resurrection itself would be. And then, such telegraphed visions or messages, or pictures, if they were real, would not have remained in the minds of the Apostles for hours: you cannot conceive of a telegraphic message so real that it developed from moment to moment like a moving picture in the minds, say, of the two disciples as they walked the Emmaus road. But the most important and truly fatal objection to the whole theory is this, that Christ, had He undertaken to communicate such pictures to the minds of the Apostles, would have actually participated in deluding the disciples, for, assuming such a theory to be true for the moment, they would be led by something that Christ Himself did to believe Christ had appeared to them in His actual bodily presence, whereas no such ap-



pearance had taken place, and He, instead of being near them, was in reality unknown to them in the glory above. This is not the way our Lord brings about convictions in the hearts of men!

#### THE FINAL NEGATIVE VALUE OF SO MANY UNACCEPTABLE THEORIES

These are the outstanding theories that have been proposed from time to time, accepted by few or many, in an attempt to explain what happened to our Lord in the last week of His life, and how the Apostles came to be preaching with power and conviction the fact of Christ's Resurrection. We have mentioned ten of them. These are not all, but the others are of minor significance. *Not one of these theories has ever met with general acceptance, even among radical critics and rationalists.* Those who deny the reality of Christ's Resurrection differ among themselves as to what theory most plausibly can be used to escape the significance of the evidence presented by the New Testament. When one puts them all together, and realizes how unreasonable they are, without foundation in fact, divorced from all the evidence that we have, involving, some one and some another, falsehood, corruption, deception, theft, fraud, ecstasies of visionary experiences, etc., it is inevitable that we should be convinced that if Christ did not rise from the dead, nobody knows anything about the conclusion of His life, and the New Testament documents are proved worthless. But we have seen that the New Testament documents are not worthless. They are of the greatest historical value.

Furthermore, if the Resurrection did not take place, we do not know how the church was founded. If Christ did not rise from the dead on the third day, we do not know how He ended His life. And to think that One, the greatest man who ever walked this earth, between the awful experience on the cross and the end of His life whenever that was,

should have been buried in the obscurity of some unknown village in Palestine, where His name once had been on the lips of every living person, is simply beyond all reason. My own frank opinion is that the Holy Spirit so guided the writers of these four Gospels, recording the events relating to Christ's Resurrection, that they were enabled to write a story which, though it relates to a stupendous miracle, is so rational, so reasonable, so logical, so close to facts which could never be imagined, that their testimony simply cannot be broken. If, after these last one hundred years of the sharpest, bitterest, most unmerciful criticism of these records, a criticism more terrifically severe than any other documents have ever endured, the Resurrection narrative still stands unshaken, unmutilated, unharmed, men ought to be persuaded that the things here spoken of are according to the truth as it is in Christ.

#### THE WILL NOT TO BELIEVE

Some will then ask, Well, why do not more men believe in the Resurrection, especially some of our outstanding scholars? I think the reason they do not believe is because they do not want to believe, that they have definitely determined not to believe. "Oh," you ask, "do you think any true modern scholar would ever determine in his own mind not to believe in something, however remarkable, if the evidence was clear concerning its reality?" Yes, I believe men will go to such an extreme because men have gone to this extreme. Let us take, e.g., the testimony of just one contemporary philosopher, Professor C. E. M. Joad, Head of the Department of Philosophy and Psychology in Birkbeck College, the University of London, since 1930, once John Locke Scholar in Moral Philosophy in the University of Oxford, and the author of a great many influential volumes in philosophy and religion. Speaking of the Resurrection of Christ, Joad, as late as 1933, declares that he *will* not be-



lieve in such an event, no matter what the evidence. These are his own words, "Even if the evidence were far more impressive than the tatter of inconsistencies, divergencies, and contradictions, which is, in fact, available, I should probably still *refuse* to credit the fact which it purported to establish. . . . Acceptance of the Resurrection and all that it implies means probably: (1) that there is a God who created the universe; (2) that for some unexplainable reason, he detached a part of Himself, known as His Son, and dispatched Him into the one particular tiny corner of the universe that you and I happen to inhabit; (3) that He did this during the infinitesimal period of time of which you and I happen to have historical knowledge. . . . It is implied, further, that remote descendants, infinitely superior to ourselves in knowledge, intellect, and, I imagine, aesthetic and spiritual capacity, will still be living on the income of the religious capital of this event. . . . I wonder! No, I don't; for I am sure that whatever else is true, this is not. . . ." <sup>29</sup> In other words, no matter what the evidence is, because of his own convictions regarding what ought to be in the universe Professor Joad frankly states that he will never believe, let us repeat his own phrase, "no matter what the evidence"! Of course, the Gospels were written that men might believe, but when men determine in their hearts that they will not believe, the Gospels will never convince them.

#### THE RESURRECTION HARMONIZES WITH CHRIST'S LIFE AND CHARACTER

The late Professor J. Gresham Machen has one of the finest paragraphs of simple assertion regarding the Resurrection of our Lord as it relates to His unique person that I think has ever been written. It is so clear, and so unanswerable, that it almost comes as a shock to a person upon first reading it. Here are his words: "You say, my friend, that

you have never seen a man who rose from the dead after he had been laid really dead in the tomb? Quite right. Neither have I. You and I have never seen a man who rose from the dead. That is true. But what of it? You and I have never seen a man who rose from the dead; but then you and I have never seen a man like Jesus. Do you not see, my friends? What we are trying to establish is not the Resurrection of any ordinary man nor the Resurrection of a man who is to us a mere *X* or *Y*, nor the Resurrection of a man about whom we know nothing, but the Resurrection of Jesus. There is a tremendous presumption against the Resurrection of any ordinary man, but when you come really to know Jesus as He is pictured to us in the Gospels, you will say that whereas it is unlikely that any ordinary man should rise from the dead, in His case the presumption is exactly reversed. It is unlikely that any ordinary man should rise; but it is unlikely that *this* man should not rise; it may be said of this man that it was impossible that He should be holden of death."<sup>30</sup>

If Christ came down from God, then it is easy to believe in His glorious Resurrection. If the Lord Jesus came into the world by a miraculous conception, it is not difficult to believe that the Lord could make an exodus from the grave by an equally miraculous manifestation of divine power. If the Lord Jesus lived an absolutely sinless life, as the Gospels reveal Him to have lived, and the Apostles believed Him to have lived, there is every reason for expecting that, being put to death, He would not remain dead in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. If the Lord Jesus predicted Himself that He would rise from the dead on the third day, and if He was the truth, as He claimed to be, if His teachings are recognized on every hand as the loftiest that have ever passed the lips of men, if when He spoke, He spoke as instructed by the Father, then we can easily believe that His prediction would be bound to be fulfilled. If throughout Christ's life He performed miracles, and raised others from



the dead, why then is it difficult to believe that He spoke the truth when He said, He would lay down His own life, and He could pick it up again? If the Lord's death on the cross was a sacrifice made for sin, His Resurrection was, as Paul said, for our justification, i.e., it forever revealed God's acceptance of His Son's vicarious, atoning work. If Christ rose from the dead, then we will rise also. It was the natural conclusion of His whole miraculous life. It was the necessary prelude to the Ascension. It is the guarantee of our own reunion with Him, when He comes again. The entire career of the Lord Jesus as depicted in the Gospels, leads straight to an empty tomb. If the Lord did not rise, the rest of His life is a mystery and mockery. If He is the only begotten Son of God, He was declared to be such "according to the Spirit of holiness, by the Resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). If He is not the Son of God, there is no need for even discussing His Resurrection. How can we help but cry out with one who once doubted it, but was led to firm conviction by overwhelming evidence, through the graciousness of His Lord, "My Lord and My God."

#### THE FINAL VERDICT

I would like to close this long chapter with two very remarkable testimonies by historical scholars regarding the certainty of the event we have been describing. The first is from Thomas Arnold, the famous Headmaster of Rugby for fourteen years (he died at the age of 47), under whose superintendence "the school became a sphere of intellectual, moral and religious discipline, where healthy characters were formed, and men were trained for the duties, struggles and responsibilities of life." Arnold, during a crowded life found time to bring out an edition of Thucydides, with English notes, and a famous *History of Rome*, in three volumes. In 1841, he was appointed to the

Chair of Modern History at Oxford, but died suddenly before he had been in office seven months. This is his verdict of the Resurrection, given in one of his famous sermons in Rugby Chapel. "The evidence for our Lord's life and death and Resurrection may be, and often has been, shown to be satisfactory; it is good according to the common rules for distinguishing good evidence from bad. Thousands and tens of thousands of persons have gone through it piece by piece, as carefully as every judge summing up on a most important cause. I have myself done it many times over, not to persuade others but to satisfy myself. I have been used for many years to study the histories of other times, and to examine and weigh the evidence of those who have written about them, and I know of no one fact in the history of mankind which is proved by better and fuller evidence of every sort, to the understanding of a fair inquirer, than the great sign which God hath given us that Christ died and rose again from the dead."<sup>31</sup>

The second testimony is from a man whose fame came some time after Arnold's death, who lived through the last three-quarters of the nineteenth century, one of the greatest scholars that the Christian Church has known in modern times, Brooke Foss Westcott, whose writings "created a new epoch in the history of modern theological scholarship." Westcott was elected in 1870 to the Regius Professorship of Divinity at Cambridge, a position he held for nearly thirty years, during which he wrote his great commentaries on the Gospel and Epistles of John, and the Epistle to the Hebrews. From 1870 to 1881, he was continually engaged in work for the revision of the New Testament, and in 1881 appeared the famous Westcott and Hort text of the New Testament, upon which had been expended nearly thirty years of incessant labor, one of the greatest achievements of English Biblical criticism. In 1879, when 54 years of age, in his remarkable book, *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, which created such a great sensation through-



out the English world upon its very first appearance (my quotation is from the Fourth Edition, revised by Westcott himself, and, therefore, his latest thought on the subject), is the following paragraph expressing such a clear, strong conviction in the reality of the event we are here discussing. "Indeed taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no single historic incident better or more variously supported than the Resurrection of Christ. Nothing but the antecedent assumption that it must be false could have suggested the idea of deficiency in the proof of it. And it has been shewn that when it is considered in its relation to the whole revelation of which it is a part, and to the conditions of the Divine action, which we have assumed, this miraculous event requires a proof in no way differing in essence from that on which the other facts with which it is associated are received as true. In a word, the circumstances under which God is said to have given a revelation to men in the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus were such as to make the special manifestation of power likely or even natural; and the evidence by which the special Revelation is supported is such as would in any ordinary matter of life be amply sufficient to determine our action and belief."<sup>32</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Ch. Guignebert: *Jesus*, New York, 1935, p. 536.

<sup>2</sup> David Strauss: *New Life of Jesus*, Eng. tr., London, 1865, I, 41, 397.

<sup>3</sup> John Mackintosh Shaw: *The Resurrection of Christ*, Edinburgh, 1920, p. 4. See also George T. Purves: *Christianity in the Apostolic Age*, New York, 1900, pp. 10-16.

<sup>4</sup> William Milligan: *The Resurrection of Our Lord*, London, 1881, pp. 43, 44. Paul's references to the Resurrection of Christ are as follows: Rom. 1:4; 6:4-10; 8:11, 34; 10:9; 14:9, I Cor. 9:1; 15:3-8, 12-23, 32, 57; II Cor. 4:14; 5:15; 13:4; Gal. 1:1; Eph. 1:20; 4:10; Phil. 2:9; 3:10; Col. 2:12; 3:1; Thess. 1:10; 4:14; I Tim. 3:16; II Tim. 2:8, 11.

<sup>5</sup> James Orr: *The Resurrection of Jesus*, 1908, pp. 37, 38. See also J. Gresham Machen: *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, New York, 1936, p. 212; and, with elaborate detail, Milligan, *ibid.*, pp. 7-31, 237-248.

<sup>6</sup> Kirsopp Lake: *The Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, New York, 1907, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott: *The Gospel of the Resurrection*, 4th ed., London, 1879, pp. 4-6.

<sup>8</sup> Orr, *ibid.*, pp. 126, 127.

<sup>9</sup> I here follow the order given by Milligan, *ibid.*, pp. 250, 251.

<sup>10</sup> Milligan, *ibid.*, pp. 49, 50.

<sup>11</sup> Milligan, *ibid.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>12</sup> Theodore Christlieb: *Modern Doubt and Christian Belief*, Eng. trans., New York, p. 474.

<sup>13</sup> Westcott, *ibid.*, pp. 121, 122.

<sup>14</sup> Fairbairn: *Studies in the Life of Christ*, 4th ed., London, 1885, pp. 354, 355.

<sup>15</sup> Milligan, *ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> David Strauss, *The Life of Jesus for the People*, E. T., 2d ed., London, 1879, i, 412. It will amaze many to know that Prof. Huxley attempted to revise this theory in a paper which he read before the Metaphysical Society in 1876, but apparently he never considered the paper worth publishing. See Leonard Huxley: *The Life and Letters of Thomas Henry Huxley*, London, 1900, i, 342.

<sup>17</sup> Milligan, *ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>18</sup> Guignebert, *ibid.*, p. 500; also p. 535.

<sup>19</sup> Lake, *ibid.*, pp. 251, 252.

<sup>20</sup> E. Digges LaTouche: *Christian Certitude. Its Intellectual Basis*, London and Boston, 1910, p. 194.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Klausner: *Jesus of Nazareth. His Life, Times and Teaching*, Eng. tr., New York, 1925, p. 357.

<sup>22</sup> Orr, *ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup> Milligan, *ibid.*, pp. 79, 80. On this strange theory, see a good discussion by Basil F. C. Atkinson, Under Librarian of the University Library, Cambridge, in his *Is the Bible True?* New York, 1933, pp. 196-198.

<sup>24</sup> Klausner, *ibid.*, p. 357.

<sup>25</sup> Headlam, *ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>26</sup> Klausner, *ibid.*, p. 359.

<sup>27</sup> LaTouche, *ibid.*, pp. 202-204; also, Orr, *ibid.*, pp. 221-226; Milligan, *ibid.*, pp. 92-114; Christlieb, pp. 490-495. On the somewhat similar Phantasmal theory, advocated by Renan, etc., see some excellent remarks by Fairbairn, *ibid.*, 341-346.



<sup>28</sup> John McNaugher: *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, Pittsburgh, 1938, pp. 9, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Arnold Lunn and C. E. M. Joad: *Is Christianity True?* London, 1933, p. 377. Prof. F. Godet devotes an entire chapter to a discussion of this theory, in his *Lectures in Defiance of the Christian Faith*, Eng. trans., 3d ed., Edinburgh, 1895, pp. 55-106.

<sup>30</sup> J. Gresham Machen: *The Christian Faith in the Modern World*, pp. 214, 215.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Arnold: *Sermons on Christian Life. Its Hopes, Its Fears, and Its Close*, 6th ed., London, 1859, p. 324.

<sup>32</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, *ibid.*, p. 137.

## EPILOGUE

IN opening this volume we set out together on a quest, a quest to discover whether or not there is sufficient evidence for convincing us that the life and work of Jesus Christ, while He dwelt among men, was a true manifestation of the supernatural. This search has been, primarily, carried out within the pages of the Four Gospels, in which the life of Christ is recorded. These records we found to be historically trustworthy. In our examination of evidence we have confined ourselves almost entirely to the birth of Christ, His miraculous works, His Transfiguration, and His Resurrection. The evidence for supernaturalism in these four spheres we have found to be overwhelmingly convincing. In this we are not alone, but find ourselves in a great company of men and women of every century, among whom are some of the finest scholars of every generation, leaders in literature, scientists, and historians.

It is true that the fact of Christ's supernaturalness has often been denied, and today is widely repudiated, but such denial and repudiation are not because the evidence for the supernaturalness of events in Christ's life is insufficient, but because of *a priori* convictions on the part of those so repudiating this truth. It is because such men do not believe in a living, sovereign God, or do not believe Christ was God's only begotten Son, that they do not believe, and confess they *will* not believe in the supernaturalness of the events we have been discussing. Theirs is not a verdict given after a careful study of evidence, but one rendered before the evidence has been considered, or rendered after an inadequate and prejudiced investigation of the evidence.



If Christ did indeed manifest supernatural power, if His entrance into the world of humanity was by a miraculous birth, if He truly rose from the dead in His own body, what conclusions are we naturally led to? There are four: that there never has been any other person in all of human history to compare with the Lord Jesus, if we consider His birth, His life, His works, His Resurrection; that what such a One said must be divinely true; that what such a One undertook to do for us, to save us from our sins by His holy death, must have been something mankind supremely needed to have done; that the full approval of God the Father was upon His entire ministry. If God approved of Christ, and all He did, will we disapprove?

God does not want us to blindly believe. He purposely inspired, through the Holy Spirit, certain men to write down the truth concerning Christ so that we might intelligently, and with full assurance, believe. "This is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on Him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 20:31; 6:40).

Without comment, let me put two statements together, in closing, one from the lips of our Lord, one from the inspired pen of the Apostle Paul. "To this end have I been born, and to this end am I come into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." "For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but . . . will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables" (John 18:37; II Tim. 4:3, 4). My dear young friend, in which group are you today?

At the close of His glorious life, when His miracles were over, and He was about to die for our sins, our Lord uttered a word of warning, as well as a word of hope and assurance, with which I would like to close this book. "Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in dark-

ness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light. These things spake Jesus, and departed, and did hide himself from them. . . . I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day. For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John 12:35, 36, 46-49).



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